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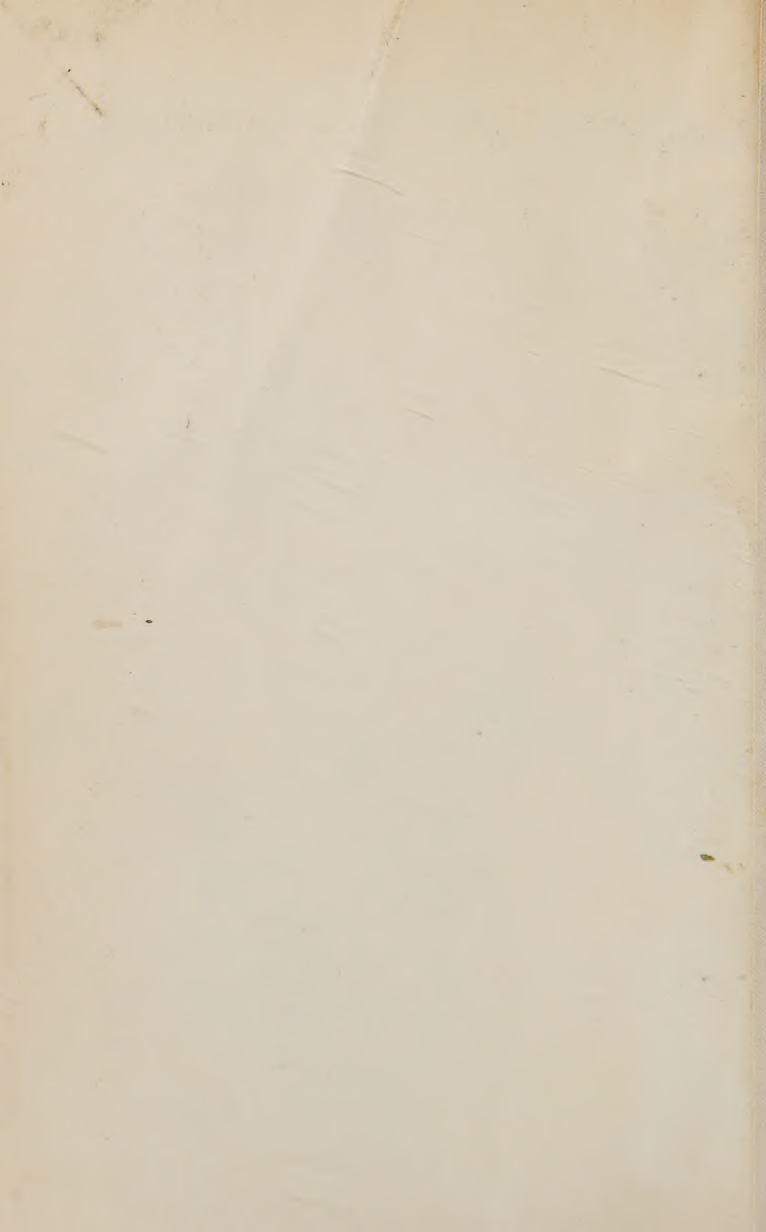
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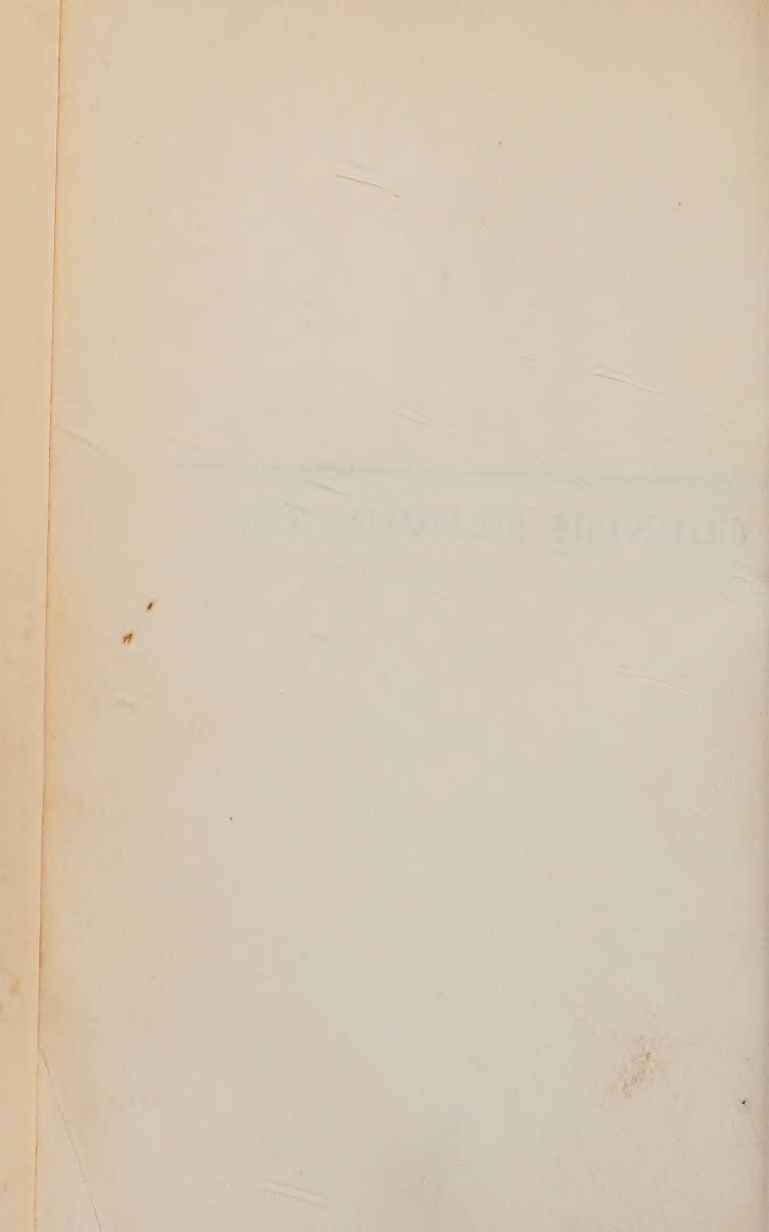




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CORNISH SILHOUETTES

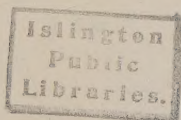


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CORNISH SILHOUETTES

BY
C. C. ROGERS

Lady Vynges



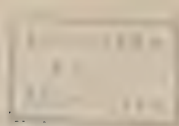
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To
M. L'E.
AND
J.T.K.T.



FOREWORD

PEOPLE and seasons and places and thoughts ; they come and go and leave little that is permanent behind them. Only, often in mid-career of my contact with these passing shows, some feverish longing impels me to try and grasp, not their whole inner significance, but at any rate their precise meaning for me, and to set it down in words.

I cannot explain the instinct. It has no known origin ; it obeys no law of common sense and regularity, and has no apparent connexion with use or beauty. Sometimes it may overpower me in the face of the dullest grey scene or the most ordinary person, but when it comes it will not be denied.

Should you seek to identify these human figures and localities, to verify time and place in each concern, I can tell you truly that your search will be in vain. Here are no clear-cut silhouettes, here no crude, unerring portraiture. Always there must hang about a picture the rainbow light of imagination.

And now, when all the silhouettes are brought together, what merit, or what interest can I expect you to find in these impressions of passing things, of dream people and dream places among which I have moved, of scenes which were once as real to me as your secret day-dreams are to you? It is enough for me, perhaps, if I can rekindle for a moment a little of their lost vitality. But for you?

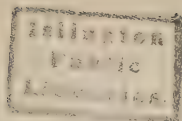
Well, you must take them as they are. And, if there is any golden thread of continuity running through them, you will find it in that spirit of the wild West Country under whose unbroken spell these thoughts have been expressed.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
	FOREWORD	ix
I	WILD CORNWALL	3
II	THE MISERS	10
III	THE ANCIENT SAGE	29
IV	FOOL OR KNAVE	44
V	ISIDORE RAPP	66
VI	MISS LILLIECRAPP'S RICHES	70
VII	SEA MEMORIES	82
VIII	STORMS IN A TEA-CUP	93
IX	AN OLD LADY	126
X	THE PENHALIGONS	129
XI	SEAL MUSIC	137
XII	THE BIRTHDAY	146
XIII	THE GIANTS' CARN	161
XIV	OLD ZACKIE	165
XV	MR. DANIEL BUZZA	180
XVI	VOICES	196
XVII	THE FOOL OF THE FAMILY	204

CHAP.	PAGE
XVIII CHURCH COVE	215
XIX THE LAST OF THEIR RACE	221
XX FOXGLOVES	244
XXI AUNT JULIET	254
XXII COUSINS	263
XXIII WHERE QUAKERS REST	269
XXIV THE SMALLNESS OF MRS. ENGEW	276
XXV A GARDEN	294
GLOSSARY OF CORNISH WORDS	305

CORNISH SILHOUETTES



CHAPTER I

WILD CORNWALL

IS there any wildness like the intimate wildness of Cornwall?

The Kentish valleys are green and fertile, oppressive like tropical vegetation or unrelieved success. The fens of Lincolnshire stretch into unbounded distance, but their spirit is always remote, just beyond the horizon. The moorlands of Devon are wild, but a little unrelenting, and the mountains of Lakeland are inaccessible of spirit, like the fens. The Midlands with their giant trees and boldly curving land have no acres untrodden or uncultivated by many generations. And the Sussex downs are naked.

In Cornwall the wildness never beckons you on and on with unfulfilled promises. All the time it is there close to you. You share in its life without any sense of your own intrusion or your own smallness.

“Foreigners” complain that we are on such a tiny scale, that our country is so cut up, our fields are so small; that we have little bogs and little

rivers, little hills and little valleys. " Foreigners " think, perhaps, that wildness consists in space, and beauty in bold design ; or perhaps they seek neither. We know that beauty has her most secret home in variety and that wildness lurks near every stream and boulder, every ragged gorse-brake and flowered hedgerow and ferny lane.

There is a peculiar intimacy between man and nature in this lonely land and a peculiar sense of remoteness from things that hamper and restrain. The farmers say nothing when you climb their gates or cut across their fields. The carters are slow-moving and hardly more alert than the horses plodding at their side. The scattered houses and villages do not stand up with proud independence ; they nestle into the ground in comfortable fashion, and the farm buildings and stone fences look like natural features.

The country is open because no high hills bar the horizon, yet mysterious because so full of variegated nooks and changing aspects. You are never far away from the waves rolling in endlessly to that rock-bound shore. There is not restlessness or movement, desire or discontent in the atmosphere ; perhaps there is little progress. Man has not brought every acre into subjection. He has but settled in the wildness and left it to grow all round him. He is no alien conqueror of the soil ; he has never left the land nor does he ever wish to leave it.

He can no more strike a false note than the trees can, or the granite boulders half embedded in the earth.

The loneliness of Cornwall is a loneliness unchanged by the presence of men, its freedom a freedom inexpressible by description or epithet.

You cannot say Cornwall is this, or that. You cannot describe it in a word or visualize it in a second. You may know the country from east to west and from sea to sea, but if you close your eyes and think about it, no clear cut image rises before you. In this quality of Changefulness have we, possibly, surprised the secret of Cornwall's wild spirit—in this intimacy the essence of its charm?

Cornwall! I see a barren stretch of country where no green things find a home; only sparse heather-clumps have gained foothold in the many-coloured stones; pink and gold, purple and green, all the colours of the rainbow are in the mineral fragments at my feet, and the magic of the desert is in the colouring of those stone heaps that stand against the sky, so near yet so remote of aspect. No sound of busy engines now; those rough mine dumps show no trace of human toil; even the chimney stacks silhouetted on the horizon have a solitary beauty of their own. They stand there, more suggestive of prehistoric ruins than of recent activity, crumbling slowly, ivy-covered, the haunt of raven and jack-daw.

I hear the wild sad cry of sea-gulls in Sleepy Hollow on the South Coast. Their shrill notes rise clear above the Rush-Hush, Hush-Rush of the breaking waves, as I sit in that green cliff amphitheatre pressing the scent of thyme from the turf. And the blue of the sea below is surely distilled from all the bluest billows rolling in from the far ends of the world.

Cornwall ! I see a land full of snipe and bogs and rough hills and granite boulders, where in hidden mine-shafts, now long overgrown, many a bullock bone lies rotting secretly. I see scattered farms and lonely villages ; Carmenellis ; Wendron ; Calvadnack ; Stithians ; Halabezack and Menerdue ; here and there a grey church tower with lichen-covered pinnacles and four-square strength defying the sinister touch of time. I see that land always in winter, grey and lonely. There is no colour in it save for the pale straw of the tussocks in the bogs and the vivid emerald of the green water-weeds that sway in every stream, a green made more brilliant by its setting of black peat and grey stones.

I see the creeks of Helford and Looe in summer, calm as if frozen into magic immobility. There is deep silence among those gnarled oaks mirrored in the water, but the jewelled king-fisher darts here and there like an iridescent ball of lightning.

I see the high coast-land of Morwenstow, Tintagel and Bude, exposed to every wind that blows ; only

the feathery tamarisk and some twisted thorns can rise above the hedges. With its close-shorn vegetation it has a half-starved, crouching air, submissive to the lash of all Atlantic gales. Yet that empty unresponsive land with frowning cliffs, precipitous and jagged, is faithful sentry through the ages, bulwark to the mighty monarch thundering at the gates.

I see the deep-bosomed wooded valleys of Doub-lebois and Cardinham opening wide arms toward barren moorland and distant sky.

And I hear the wild strange music of the names : Altarnun, Lostwithiel, Meneage ; Luxulyan, Tregonissey, St. Ewe ; Bosporthennis, Tolpeddon, Restronguet ; Lamorna, Ruan Lanihorne, Treviades ; Morwenstow, Rosemergy, Halzaphron ; Gunwalloe, Coldrenick, Endellion.

Cornwall ! I see the sheltered valley by the sea where the early primrose opens. Leaving the shore you can follow the boggy course of the streamlet up the valley if you step carefully on the knotty roots of the wild iris and the clumps of rushes and the higher tussocks of grass ; but beware of the carpet of golden saxifrage, for where it grows the mud is always soft. The clear green leaves of the hemlock are already up with their cold and cruel scent, while overhead the catkins are pendulous and yellow. When you reach the head of the valley it is as if you came suddenly on sunshine rising from the soil.

The three slopes enclose you with light and colour and fragrance, for the gorse is all abloom. You drink in the scent and the brilliance and the colour of it till you are conscious of nothing else and your whole being is just a clear gold flame.

Cornwall ! I see a race of people sometimes wiry, dark-faced, excitable, with black hair and searching eyes, sometimes fair, big-boned and slow in thought and movement ; a people always very slow to change ; a people remote in every sense, elusive, not to be pigeon-holed as this or that. Their thoughts and feelings are rooted in far-away forgotten times, their traditions are no dead letter but co-essential with their flesh and blood. The happenings of European and extra-European states, world developments and world upheavals trouble them not, or only reach their rock-bound shores with the faint reverberation of a twice-told tale.

Yet who am I, presumptuous atom trying to imprison the spirit of Cornwall in human words ?

Like the novelists who come in from outside, sensitive and eager, reaching out to touch the intangible, and all the result of their striving is poured into pictures of a brooding sky over a primitive land, peopled by folks withdrawn and sinister and sometimes cruel.

Like the profiteers who exploit the " Cornish Riviera," making of its sunshine a commercial asset, the profiteers for whom there is no meaning

in grey mist, or in "plum" days when the sun never shines and things grow as in a hot-house.

Like one trying to chain the swallow, or build a castle with reflections, or fetter sunshine in a cage.

That spirit of Cornwall; the spirit of wildness and beauty ! I only know that it is not to be captured and yet it is everywhere. It is very close, yet inaccessible as the stars. It is old and immeasurable, mysterious as the Dolmens and Menhirs outlined against the western sky, yet vital as the opening bud or the dawning sun. It has a myriad changing forms, but it is one and unchangeable. None can ever know it ; yet one thing I surely know, that in Cornwall, above all other places in the earth, it is very true that " He leaveth countless tracks behind Him, yet passeth out of sight."

CHAPTER II

THE MISERS

THERE were three in the family and the story of their life is neither pretty nor edifying ; yet it maybe it is worth the telling. A peculiar interest attaches to them as the last of their kind, and soon they will figure in the annals of the past with some of the glamour of a lost species. Perhaps, like the Great Auk, the Dodo and the Sloth, they will, when once they have passed away, invite the researches of the wise and the comments of the foolish ; in that case these slight records may serve as food for both or either.

Perhaps, too, the memory of their habits will not be altogether without value, if it survive to point, with the warning finger of destiny, towards the bitter end of a ruling passion.

They were two sisters and a brother. The farm had been in the Skewes family for centuries. How far back they had contracted the hoarding habit nobody could say, but the acquisitive instinct must have been there through generations ; there was capital in the bank to prove it, capital bringing in

many hundred pounds a year. It seemed as if the persevering industry of generations had culminated in these three, and, like over-ripe fruit, had reached a point where there was an end of virtue, where thrift became sordid avarice. Of course, like all degeneration, it must have been a gradual process, and, on the day of judgment, Abraham, Tryphena and Maria Sampson may well turn round and curse their forbears, for these three were but the perfected types of a long-germinating tendency.

I can hardly remember the old people, but I have heard the vicar's daughters relate how they were taken to the farm as children and how the father always entertained them by setting them sums about the price of apples. They well remember too the consternation in the Skewes family when, during the mother's last illness, the doctor ordered her two eggs a day and a few little extras that would cost money. Josiah Skewes, the father, was the last man in the parish to set a man-trap in his orchard, and you can see that man-trap in the old barn to this very day.

My earliest memories of the family are mingled with feelings of curiosity and terror. We used to pass the old farm-house in our walks, and we never could go by without feeling that some evil thing crouched hidden behind those high grey walls, waiting to spring out and suck us in silently, swiftly, to some horrific region where cries and struggle

would avail us not at all. And well might any child shrink and wonder what lay behind those ancient walls and the rotting door tied up with string, what crime or mystery or madness, what age-long, moss-bound tragedy.

The actual setting of the place is full of charm, for, coming from that bleak mining country where stacks and dumps defy all vegetation, and stones encrust the surface of the earth, you enter suddenly into a green valley, a veritable pool of sunshine, to hear the cheerful cawing of rooks in the elms, to see primroses and early violets in the hedge, and apple-blossom in the orchard ; and the old farm-house, grey in a green setting, with beautiful lattice windows. Nestled there with the sun pouring down on its weather-beaten face, the home of the Skewes family, as you look down on it across the valley, is like a haunt of ancient peace. From your point of vantage the stillness round the farm has an air of serene beauty, nor can you guess that below the stillness is rottenness and dirt and mouldering decay.

To reach the farm you drop down the lane, cross by a plank bridge the stream that flows rusty red from the tin works, and then climb a little pitch, first passing a pond on your left. Even now I can hardly pass that pond without a shudder ; its water is black, inky black, and its margin is fringed with the blackest mud, so that the brown leaves drifting

about on its surface are brilliant by comparison. Gnarled oaks overhang that pond in imprisoning circle ; year after year they feed its slime with their decaying leaves. No light has ever penetrated there and you feel that no happy thing, no child or bird or flower has ever looked at its own reflection in the dark, unrippled water. It is silent, terrifying, depthless, a place to drop a corpse in quietly at the dead of night ; there would be one faint gurgle, a few bubbles and the black slime below the black water would swallow that grim secret, to disgorge it nevermore.

That involuntary shrinking from the old farm and its inmates was not peculiar to ourselves alone. It was with something like foreboding and every sense attuned to fear, that men, women and children would approach the grey wall and the mouldering door. The Skewes family had always been somewhat isolated from their neighbours, by their own nature and their own manner of living ; there was nothing sociable or ordinary about them. With their dark, withdrawn faces, their downward and sidelong way of looking when they spoke to you and listened furtively for your reply, and their queer solitary habits, they gave rise to many a strange tale. It was as if a veil of romance hung round them, preventing people from seeing them as they were ; only, instead of being fairylike, alluring, it was the romance of things sinister and not to be

understood, of gloomy secrets and impenetrable shade. You would notice that, whenever the name of Skewes was mentioned, the speaker would drop his voice and glance aside in an involuntary, half-suspicious manner, as if some enemy were listening round the corner.

Abraham Skewes was the eldest, and then came Tryphena, and last of all Maria Sampson; the choice of her second name had something to do with an old uncle and expectations, or so the story ran. As for Tryphena, she was too grand for her surroundings. She had acquired more education than the others by an unexpected stroke of fortune. Grandfather Skewes, admiring the girl's fine carriage and figure, had left her a substantial legacy, providing that the interest be expended on her "education in foreign parts" until she was eighteen. The happy event of his demise took place when Tryphena was fourteen, and as soon as the money was realized the old people decided to put her to school in Belgium. A *pension* in Brussels was chosen and Mrs. Skewes was to cross the water with Tryphena, using, of course, her daughter's money for the expenses of her daughter's escort. In those days, young things of Tryphena's tender age and sex did not travel to London alone, much less on the Continent. Mother and daughter set out on the Tuesday for London, and on Wednesday evening Mrs. Skewes returned home, to the astonishment of the whole

village and of her own family. Her explanation was short and simple. It had seemed such an expense to buy another ticket to Brussels, so she had put the money into candlesticks instead.

Tryphena returned from her four years' schooling with a spirit of inquiry which was henceforward to lead her on to things new and strange. She would read queer books and magazines, and talk of big movements in foreign parts of the kingdom, or even beyond the kingdom, movements which had neither interest nor meaning for her listeners, while she took no notice at all of the really great events in our parish. She liked to know what other people were doing too, and to get a peep into lives that moved in higher spheres. She followed up this thirst for knowledge with a directness all her own, and so unusual was the simplicity of her methods that she came to be considered mad, or at the least eccentric. Witness her early morning call on Lady Pentewan and also the story of the Skewes tennis-parties.

Although Lady Pentewan and Tryphena Skewes lived in the same parish and prayed in the same church, you could hardly call them acquaintances, and calls had never been exchanged. Tryphena walked up the long drive to the Manor House one morning at 9.30 and rang the front door bell.

"Can I see Lady Pentewan, please?" No reason given, not even a card sent in, but the mistress of the house, who was crossing the hall on her way out

from breakfast, turned to look at the strange figure on her doorstep.

“How do you do, Lady Pentewan,” said Tryphena, advancing across the threshold. “I hear you have just been presented at Buckingham Palace. May I see your dress, please?”

“My dress is in London,” said the astonished lady, and the interview was ended.

As for the tennis-parties below the farm, they became historic in the annals of the parish. The Skewes family, who supported their convictions more frequently with their presence than their purse, had always attended the parish church. When the old detached belfry of St. Melyan fell in the vicar collected subscriptions from his parishioners for its restoration, and in due course he approached Tryphena because she was the elder sister and reputed a shade less “near” than Abraham.

“Well now,” she replied with a swift sidelong glance, “if I give you a subscription for the belfry, will your daughters come one day and show us how to play tennis? I’ve got a nice place for a court in the field down beyond the mowhay.”

The simple vicar agreed without demur. He waited in the moth-eaten parlour while Tryphena went upstairs. There were sounds of heavy boxes being dragged to and fro in the upper room and presently she returned with a two-shilling piece.

On the appointed day the vicar's three daughters arrived with their racquets and found Tryphena in the field beyond the mowhay. She was counting some very mossy-looking balls which she had borrowed ; she had also secured the loan of a racquet that was sprung. Maria Sampson was just finishing the marking out of the court, which was original both in device and execution. A string was attached from one twisted blackthorn stake to another, across ground that was rather marshy and indifferently level. Pendant from this cord were pieces of old braid, knotted on at intervals to give it the appearance of a net. The court itself was marked out with strips of unbleached calico ; here and there the boundaries took a generous curve to dodge a clump of rushes. Maria Sampson was bending over the calico with half a dozen hairpins in her mouth, to peg it down more firmly in one or two places.

" 'Tis a sparey job," she muttered, as she completed her fourth circle round the court. Naturally the borrowed balls had lost their bounce and the reedy, uncut grass did not provide the hardest of surfaces, but the vicar's daughters were happy folk who enjoyed life from many a different angle and they had their full share of entertainment on that afternoon. Tryphena and Maria Sampson went in to their tea, rejoicing no doubt that they were really launched at last in the great world of fashion.

It was in the spring following the year of the tennis-parties that Tryphena went suddenly on a visit to London. Ten days later she telegraphed for her jewels and her skates to be sent on to New York, and after that she disappeared from view. But all those things happened many years ago, and I can only remember the elder sister dimly, as a fine upstanding figure with a hooked nose, a dress of some stiff crimson material, a kind of toque on her head when other people were wearing broad-brimmed hats, and a pressing-forward attitude as she walked.

.

After the disappearance of their sister, Abraham and Maria Sampson kept house alone and their intercourse with their fellow-creatures became more and more spasmodic. One or two neighbours were on visiting terms with them, Mrs. Magor at the post office, the farmer whose land marched with theirs, and the two Miss Bullmores, daughters of the miller ; but for the most part they kept themselves close.

Abraham, or Ikey as he was more generally called, was never one for salutations in the market-place. He farmed his own land with the help of one under-paid labourer, a creature half-wanting and crooked as a scythe, taken early from the workhouse and broken in to work fifteen hours a day and to sleep in a shed. Every Thursday the brother drove to market in a moss-green coat and a black hat that

looked furry with age. I can see him now, silhouetted against the sky, driving along that open road across the deserted mining district. He would sit in his high spring cart with no more animation than an image, the strangest figure with his side whiskers and those black eyes that never glanced to right or left but were always looking downward on the old grey mare and the harness tied up with string. It is possible that he saw neither horse nor harness, nor road, that he was rapt in a kind of ecstasy, for his lips were ever moving as if he could not cease from counting up his hoard.

Ikey never put up his gig at the *Seven Bells* or the *Royal Oak* as all the other farmers did. He was not so foolhardy as to spend an unnecessary sixpence. There was in Tregew a large furniture store with a yard behind. Here, by special arrangement with the owner, he stabled his mare every market-day in the year. In return for this weekly hospitality Mr. Boase was allowed to come out once in the Spring, bringing his own lunch, to shoot young rooks on the Skewes farm. When he had tied up the old mare among the straw and the packing cases, Ikey would stagger back to the market-place with a laden basket on each arm, his shifty eyes searching the road while he walked and his lips moving in calculation.

It is not likely that he had looked up to the sky or seen the sunshine for many a year. He was

always gazing downward, not with the loathsome purpose of the old gentleman in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, but either looking at his roots or searching for his eggs, or counting coins, or lost in mazes of addition and subtraction.

One day Farmer Loam came across him bent double under a load of straw, looking like some ill-cared-for beast of burden.

"Mr. Skewes," he said, "why do you work like that when you can afford to pay some one else to do it for you? You're a rich man and you did ought to enjoy your life now."

"Mr. Loam," said Ikey, in tones that were almost menacing, "if them that come after me gets half as much pleasure in spending my money as I have in saving it, they'll do very well."

Maria Sampson was more forthcoming in manner than her brother and now and then she would invite a neighbour or two in to supper. It was the elder Miss Bullmore who gave me a vivid description of the first and last supper party that she ever attended at the farm. Accompanied by Mrs. Magor from the post office, she arrived after dark on a December evening, and Maria Sampson led them through the kitchen into the parlour. She was wearing clothes that would have ill become a scarecrow; a black skirt that looked as if it had been covering roots in some outhouse; a purple blouse shot with rose and yellow, streaked witnesses of many a failure in the

dye-pot ; shoes that flopped as she moved about and grey stockings darned with every colour from her work-basket. The hands and face of their hostess were not merely dirty in the ordinary sense of the word, for dirt is a thing that one can detect, while in Maria Sampson's person flesh and grime had kept company for so long that it was now impossible to distinguish which was which ; close association had made them one.

The kitchen floor was " that thick with dirt an' cinders you could 'ave grown 'taties there." The parlour was lit by one guttering candle. " A proper old smeech when we walked in there." A set of Scott's novels, with the dust of ages on them, filled the upper shelves of the book-case, and in the lower ones were pile upon pile of financial newspapers and mine prospectuses. A cracked harmonium, bought cheap at a sale, stood against one wall and a round table set for supper by the other. The whole place, the walls, floor, ceiling and chairs, had a curiously repellent aspect. No window had been opened for years. You picked up your skirts involuntarily, you kept well away from the corners of the room and you shrank from every empty chair. " 'Twas a grimy old place full o' dirt an' cobwebs." On the table was a loaf and a tea-pot, also half a saffron cake and a leek pie ; and a saucer of butter that had first melted into a liquid and then congealed again, but was still spread out like a sauce,

instead of standing up in a self-respecting pat.

Presently Ikey shuffled in, wearing his father's old tail coat and mouldy trousers, and a dicky that was more nearly grey than white, and when his sister had made the tea they all sat down to supper. He began to cut the loaf, with hands that made you shudder, picking up the crumbs that fell and eating them one by one. Soap was not a household commodity in the Skewes family. Suddenly he looked up.

" Maria Sampson, where've you putt the ham to ? "

" Why, lor', Abraham," she said, rising hurriedly and fumbling in her side, " I brought it home yesterday from Tregew, in my pocket. " And she produced from the folds of her person the *pièce de résistance* of that evening meal, wrapped up in newspaper.

The ham fat was, at this stage of its career, hardly to be separated from the lettering of the news-sheet, and the guests developed a sudden preference for the leaner portions. It was all they could do. After this savoury meal another candle was lit and they had music.

The cracked harmonium wheezed and groaned under the hands and feet of Mrs. Magor who played and sang " Where is my wan-drin' b-hoy to-night ? " with as much feeling as the circumstances would permit. Abraham drew his chair close up

to the fire of sticks and sat there listening, with an unfilled pipe in his mouth and his yellow hands spread before the blaze which was all crackle and no warmth. Later on in the evening Maria Sampson took her turn at the instrument and, in a falsetto voice, gave utterance to "Little Brown Jug." The effect of this merry old drinking song was not inspiriting on this occasion, it was truly weird. Music and musician seemed to have no remote connexion with each other, and every tone and gesture was divorced from the meaning of the words. Mirth and merriment could find no mouth-piece in that dirty old bunch of humanity seated on the rickety stool, emitting those high cracked notes that had neither depth nor expression. All the time as she sang she was glancing down and sideways. "It put one all of a creem." It must have been a most uncanny scene and after a few more ditties the guests gathered up their skirts, waited while Abraham lit their lantern with a newspaper spill, and then departed.

After awhile the supper-parties lapsed altogether, possibly because few visitors were tempted to repeat the experience, possibly because the avarice of the Skewes family grew and grew, usurping the few social instincts that remained to them. Ikey never failed to attend the weekly market, but the public appearances of Maria Sampson became more and more infrequent, and at last she withdrew even

from the church. She had always attended evening service by preference, because there was a larger congregation to screen her denial of the collection bag. This at any rate was the general belief, because once, long ago at matins, she had been the only occupant of the front row of pews and she had been shamed into parting with a button rather than let the sidesman walk right across to her and return empty-handed. But there came a dark and windy night of November when her Sunday hat blew away into the stream by the tin-works, as she was walking home, and, though she spent half the hours of darkness fishing for it with a stick, she never saw her hat again. After that loss she gave up church altogether. It had proved too expensive.

By this time her intercourse with her fellow-creatures was determined only by necessity: pleasure had no part in it. There was Mrs. Loam from whom she bought skim milk, since Ikey had given up his cows and taken to pigs and poultry; there was Happy Lizzie, the charwoman, who came in once a month to "clean up a bit," and there were the few tradesmen who called at her door in carts.

Happy Lizzie was one of those minus quantities who had never found anybody in a lower state of life than herself. She inhabited a hovel owned by Ikey, a hovel which even the most optimistic could hardly call rain-proof, and she existed on charring and casual charity. One and three a day, with

your food, was the accepted rate for chars in St. Melyan, but the Skewes family had always arranged to give one and five and no food ; so it happened that on the days when Happy Lizzie went charring for her landlord she had to take her tea and dinner with her. On one such day, having heard that they had just been " putting away " a pig at the Manor, she went up to Pentewan to beg for screeds before beginning her work. She was successful in her errand, but by an unlucky lapse of memory she said good night to Maria Sampson and went home forgetful of her precious fragments that she had left, together with the remains of her tea, in a roll of newspaper on the stairs. She returned next day to find that the brother and sister had consumed every morsel, nor was she offered any compensation for the loss.

There was a good deal of public indignation about this story, for it was felt that anyone who could stoop to Happy Lizzie's leavings was hardly in a position to claim kinship with the human race. And that was not the last shock to the susceptibilities of the neighbours. It is to be supposed that there are degrees even of soaplessness, for every one declared that Maria Sampson was growing dirtier and dirtier, while every one was well aware that soap had not touched her person for many a year. At any rate a crisis was reached one morning when Mrs. Loam refused to fill her milk-can.

Now the Skewes milk-can had never been like those used by other folk : it was an old treacle tin, perforated twice by nails for the threading of a string handle. It was seldom washed, but Mrs. Loam had hitherto refrained from comment. " 'Tes foathy to try an' change other folks' ways. 'Tain't no business of mine." And daily she poured out the milk in silence, until the morning when she saw two slugs in the bottom of the tin, and at that she up and said Miss Skewes must clean her tin or go without her milk.

Only a few weeks later the elder Miss Bullmore met Maria Sampson just outside Churchtown ; her old black skirt was gathered up in her arms, displaying a petticoat that seemed to be woven of dust and cobwebs, and from the folds of her upper garment there dripped a strange dark liquid.

" Why, Miss Skewes, whatever've you got there a-runnin' out ? You're losin' of it all."

" Oh, 'tes only a little manure I found on the road. I'm takin' it home for Brother, it'll come in handy for the garden."

After that neither kindness nor curiosity could have prevailed on anyone in the district to cross the Skewes threshold. Everybody shunned them, and except for Happy Lizzie and the crooked labourer, the occupants of the old grey farm lived in a solitude like that of a desert island. They were simply banned like outlaws from the human race,

only there was never any hue and cry and no publicity about their exile. They were not sent forth to wander in the country, but by tacit consent every living soul drew away from them. Gradually their avarice, like some fearful canker, had eaten into their lives, destroying every soft and lovely thing. Personal cleanliness had gone long ago, and personal comfort too ; you would see Maria Sampson on the coldest winter day picking up sticks from the roadside, and the coal bill of the Skewes household would have been moderate for a cat. Love and friendship there had never been at any time in their lives, and now all friendly associations with their neighbours had died a natural death, for any kindly interest in another, any unselfish thought, must have been extinguished at birth in the condition to which they had accustomed themselves.

No warmth proceeded from their hearts, there was no place in their lives for a smile, a handshake, or a greeting.

So they lived on in an isolation bitter indeed to contemplate, an isolation where all things warm and light and hopeful could find no place ; but the profoundness of their tragedy lay in this, that towards the end they must have lost all sense of interdependence with their kind, becoming quite unconscious of their loneliness.

“ She’s a walkin’ bundle o’ dirt an’ rags,” the neighbours would say, if they caught sight of Maria

Sampson, and indeed there was nothing more to be said about her, soul or body.

To each and all, in this world of God's own making, his appointed fate or function. Sunshine for the butterfly, and honey for the bee, for the waters movement, and stillness for the rock, bloom and harvest for the rooted plant, for birds the gift of song and flight ; none can deny their lot, none will cast away their portion. And man has love, with hope and comradeship ; without them he is but a shadow of the human form, a hollow shape of flesh and bones without a meaning, without a goal. By these alone he lives, by these alone are work and growth and life and death made possible.

CHAPTER III

THE ANCIENT SAGE

TO-DAY I saw in the town a face that sent a stab right through me. For one second I thought it was the Ancient Sage.

Then I remembered that she is far away, and that it could not be the Ancient Sage. And the cold wind blew mercilessly round the corners, and the grey streets looked more sad after the thrill that such a reminder of her presence gave me.

She is far away across the water, yet I do not ever feel that she is really out of reach. There is no chance of our meeting for years, but I know that whenever and wherever I see her next she will be exactly the same.

Meanwhile, I feel close to her whenever the wind blows on my face or the moon shines in at my window ; whenever I watch the flowers turning to the sun or hear the tree leaves sighing in the breeze ; whenever I see the grey clouds scudding along in haste or the white ones piled against heaven's blue. For we love those things, she and I, in just the same way.

The Ancient Sage is fifty. She has a tumbling mass of iron-grey hair and a face unlike any other. Her eyes see far, but are not gentle, and her mouth is half-amused and wholly determined. I have seen her in evening dress and her figure was more striking than any around her, but in the ball-room she was not the Ancient Sage.

I can picture her now as I knew her and loved her best. She walks along the top of a cliff starred with blue scabious, white daisies and yellow trefoil. She is dressed in an old black coat and skirt ; the skirt is looped in a bunch round her waist and she ties a faded, floppy hat under her chin with a grey, flowered scarf. She wears no stockings, only speckled sand-shoes, and her ankles are scratched and sunburnt ; but the thing that you notice first is not her shabbiness, not the faded tone of her scarf nor the frayed hem of her skirt : it is the beauty of her bearing and her walk, the curve of neck and shoulder which the oldest clothes cannot conceal.

She can walk all day with energy, but never seems to hurry. In one hand she carries a string-bag loaded with provisions for the day, in the other a blackthorn stick ; she herself eats little and that little, for choice, is bread.

I can never forget those days, nor the beauty of that lonely West Country coast, nor the breadth and peacefulness of mind that I attained, with-

out any effort, in the presence of the Ancient Sage.

We lived in a tiny red-roofed cottage ; our gate opened into a lane that ran down a green little valley to the sea. We had no servants and no troubles ; no conventions and no regular hours. We never used our watches, we wore the fewest possible clothes, we slept and ate when we felt inclined.

Every day we would be out on the cliffs for hours and hours, lying down between the gorse-bushes with our faces turned to the sun ; or wandering along the beaches, bathing, clambering over rocks, peering into pools at the many-coloured gardens in the water, gardens filled with seaweed and stones and sea-anemones ; or else curled up among the smooth pebbles of the higher shore, listening to the sea-music. And everywhere the air was clean and bright and fragrant with the scent of thyme and camomile.

When twilight came on we would turn our faces inland to the open moor, and scramble through the undergrowth in some valley where a stream came hurrying down to the sea. One of these we loved more than any valley we had ever seen.

The stream in it had dark pools and silver falls, and sometimes on its bracken-covered banks great boulders of granite were piled up, and sometimes

there was such a tangle of trees and shrubs and plants that we could find no way through, but had to make our way onwards by crawling up the bed of the stream. Apple-trees, butcher's broom and blackthorn grew there, with luxuriant masses of hemlock and fern. It was very dark in there and the undergrowth was lush, and the pools were velvety brown, and there was a wonderful mystery and loneliness. Higher up, the bed of the stream was rocky ; often huge boulders blocked our way and we had to wriggle up the channels deepened between them by the silver splashing falls.

And so, picking wild rue and blue skull-cap and many curious water-plants, we left the stream behind, and came, through a swamp with grass tussocks and bog-myrtle, to the open moor.

There such a thrill would overcome us that it was impossible to speak ; we could only sit quite still in the heather ; we ourselves, our bodies and our personalities, became the most remote thing in the world, and there was nothing in the whole of existence but space ; and that space was moor and sky, and we had become part of it, only retaining enough consciousness to feel its existence, not our own. There were no lurid clouds, no brilliant colours ; only a great sweeping curve far away against the sky, and at one point of the sweeping curve a single line of firs outlined, half of them dead ones ; and in the sky a gentle sunset light that

was more beautiful than anything lurid or brilliant could ever be.

And the sky grew more full of peace, and darker, and more beautiful.

But all that was what we felt together when we knew the moorland well. I can remember the first evening I saw it thus.

We were driving along, three of us, through the very heart of it, in a low pony-cart, and when the sunset-light began to fade it was too beautiful to be endured when other people were there. At last I could not bear it any longer, but had to jump out, saying, "I want exercise," and to set off running down the long, straight road and then up a side track over the soft grass, and then over tufts of heather and half-broken-down hedges, into the quiet cornfields with their tidy footpaths and grey stiles overlooking the sea.

One might think that after such times as those we spent in the heather, the next move must bring a sudden drop to earth again ; but it was not so. On such nights we did not return to the life of prose and custom.

We would return along winding lanes to the head of our little valley, and there I would leave the Ancient Sage and her steady walk to run down the steep hill. The hedges grew higher and higher, and the road narrower and more lonely, only the sound of my shoes knocking over the loose stones

disturbed the breathless quiet. By the time she arrived our lamp would be lit and our cold supper ready. After that we had only to settle ourselves for the night, not between sheets, in a cell with tiny windows, but rolled in blankets on cushions and mattresses in the open air.

Side by side we made our beds on the strip of grass between the cottage and the hedge which shut out the road. We lay under the wide sky, with the stars looking down on us, the white flowers on a rose-bush gleaming close at hand; and the only sounds were the gentle sighing of the sedges in the stream across the road, and the croaking of a corn-crake in the field above the cottage.

Then she would talk. Such talk I have never heard. How can I possibly describe it? It was in tune with the peace of the night and with the beauty of everything round us. It betrayed an intimacy with wind and water, leaf and stone, with clouds and fields and hills and valleys; an intimacy that was not only knowledge of these things, but real friendship with them, as with human personalities. All the deepest meaning, all the happiest times in her life came to her among wild things in wild places, for those things satisfied her utterly.

She would tell me too about parts of her life. It had not been an unhappy one, but it had been full and varied and always responsible. It had not

bred in her any cut-and-dried philosophy, though she had far more real philosophy than the ordinary mortal ; nor had it taught her a remedy for every evil under the sun.

At moments I almost thought her cold, because her breadth seemed limitless, her outlook so impersonal and unimpassioned. Once, I remember, she began to talk about the things in life that did not matter ; one of the chief of these, she said, was what other people thought. But even then there was no excitement in her tone.

Surely, I thought, her knowledge of that truth could only be born of an intense scorn ; scorn for their artificial standards, scorn for their shallow conventions. Yet it was not. There was no trace of violence in her attitude, only a firm grasp of the essential not weakened by any tolerance of the unessential. Nor was hers the position of one who, having lived much and thought much, has attained a vantage-point on which to rest, viewing others with kindly observation, or extending a helping hand. Her vitality was still unbroken and the path of progress was not all behind her.

At that very time, finding herself for the moment without any ties, she was preparing to carve out for herself a new career, which involved a training of drudgery and self-denial and the renunciation of many of the beautiful things in life. And the

Ancient Sage loved all those things, whether natural or artistic, with a love that was a very vital part of her.

And then the moon came up behind us and we went to sleep.

Many things happened before I met the Ancient Sage again in peaceful surroundings. The moor and the sea were miles away and several years had passed. She had learnt all the lessons that drudgery could teach and had drifted back to a life of leisure.

It was May and we were in a country ablaze with fields of buttercups lying at the foot of sharp-backed ridges where veins of white chalk showed, here and there, on the green shoulders.

There was so much to be said that any beginning was difficult and our first silence was heavy. Everything was changed, even we ourselves. Yes, even the Ancient Sage. Upheavals had come into our lives, the present was black, the future threatening. Only in reminiscence could we find any peace, and we began to talk about the past.

Groping for some general idea that would lead us away from the troubles hemming us both in, I asked her what she would say to anyone inquiring—"What have you learnt in all these years? What do you cling to and what discard? What can you ignore? What really helps?"

"There is only one thing to remember," said the

Ancient Sage. "Only one thing that can make you really happy. Try and do everything for other people. Throw yourself into their interests."

Like Naaman, the leper, I was staggered and a little ashamed at the utter simplicity of such a prescription. However, she went on in a dreamy disconnected way to tell me about some of her feelings of long ago and how they had led her on to see things as she saw them now, and, bit by bit, I gathered together an impression of her early years.

She had always been quite aloof in mind. "What other people think" had never mattered to her and ambition had never goaded her on to what she called "tiresome energies." Years ago a friend had said to her—"You can sit in the middle of the ball-room alone, not caring what other people think and looking as if you didn't care."

That picture of her stuck in my mind; alone in a crowd, always erect and always unperturbed.

She hated some people, but the ones she liked were all on the same level and many of her intimacies were kept up, on her side, entirely by her consciousness of her friends' need of her. She lived in a world of her own and what she enjoyed most of all was the quiet fun in her own mind at everything that went on and at other people's peculiarities. She had a great power of charm and people would

buzz round her if she exerted herself to be amusing. She derived a certain amount of pleasure out of this power, making up her mind to conquer this person and that, and watching the progress of each conquest with a detached interest.

She was never really bored, but then she seldom experienced deep thrills of joy. Such thrills came now and then after a conquest of a person or of a difficulty, for there was in her something pugnacious that led her always to face things and even to enjoy a fight.

Among the times that she had really enjoyed there stood out in her memory certain visits to the West Country, where the wildness of the scenery induced a holiday frame of mind that carried her into another world. She could live out of doors then and could wander about in the long evenings till it was nearly dark. There were also some visits to Warwickshire where every one wanted her and she could enjoy the feeling of being enormously appreciated; she could sit about in delicious gardens, she knew all the people round, even all the hedges and fields and short cuts and woods and ditches, and every one welcomed her and she lived in the lives of her host and hostess for awhile.

It was during one of those long visits that she used to steal out at night into the quiet garden and wander round it till she knew every leaf and flower

by touch. She had an instinctive *flair* for wild things. Her spirit was averse to convention and her feet always strayed from high roads.

Until the age of thirty she had had no real education ; then her mind woke up because she was with clever people and she began to read everything. No wonder she could attract people, since her love of fun and light-hearted capacity for enjoying life was mingled with many interests and a most unusual selflessness. She never read with system, but she brought a wide sympathy to her perusal of books and she carried away a wide outlook.

With old age, she declares, one grows less tolerant of others, more critical of their faults, less ready to be always helping them and more easily bored. Looking back, she says that she is quite sure to be vague is better than to be definite, because definite people make others go off, from sheer contradictoriness, in the opposite direction.

On a line with this is her dislike of analysing people and things—" For Heaven's sake," she says, " take them as they are."

" What about Social reformers ? " I said. " Surely they, with their definite aims, do accomplish things?"

" Reforms would come," she declared, " even without bustling workers. Anything is better than those heavy people who are such bores. Really, the best characters I have come across have been among

the leisured rich ; splendid people who just live and are loved by every one near them. I have never met anyone lovable among the purposeful workers who run in grooves and often impose on others reforms for which they are quite unready. There is too much introspection and analysing and interference nowadays."

" Yes," I said, " in old days when life was simple and the world was thinly peopled ; but now, when isolation from reality often comes in the train of wealth, and selfishness is born of leisure, surely your theories will not work ? "

" Well, the only thing in life is to be natural and I think the people I describe are leading more natural lives than anyone else."

And a long silence fell between us.

" The only thing in life is to be natural." Certainly the Ancient Sage lived up to that.

Time and order and planning did not bind her and she had kept a wonderful power of quietly doing what she wanted to do ; loitering about the lanes after dark, speaking out real thoughts to strangers in trains, sitting outside on a window-sill on a sunny morning cutting her nails, coming down to breakfast at odd times in odd dressing-gowns. Not that she obtruded any peculiarities on other people, for so much of her life had been spent in paying visits that she could perfectly adapt herself to the ways of her companions. Only when

she got away alone with anyone at all congenial, she relapsed at once into these habits.

They were not so much the outcome of Bohemianism or eccentricity as of a quite unusual simplicity. She practised the fine art of doing what she liked, when she liked, in the way she liked, remaining all the time quite unspoilt by self-consciousness.

She had little belief in set creeds or formulated ideals. Many a time I have heard her say—"After all this talk about duty, people always do just what they want to do."

Did this amazing indifference to the Puritanical bugbear that still overshadows us betoken blindness on her part or a sublime sense of proportion which could treat such a spirit as though it were not? One thing is certain: whether she ever encountered this spiritual bugbear or not, she never suffered its hard embrace. In her mind there lingered no suspicion of the overworked theory that, other things being equal, the disagreeable way is probably the salutary way. No morbid instinct towards self-sacrifice ever crowned her real unselfishness, or poisoned for one moment her enjoyment of life.

A certain largeness, perhaps looseness, about her ideas made her receptive powers very great and saved her from personal fads and prejudices. It also led her to a rather painfully keen sense of the

futility of all things, or the equality of all things. Her hatred of bustle inclined her to the *dolce far niente* attitude, while her remarks would sometimes descend like icy flakes on enthusiasm and hope. It seemed as if, to her mind, all things were worth contemplating, but no grasping spirit of selection ever held a place in her love of experience.

I think her outlook was a little sombred by a continual sense of the brooding presence of Destiny in human life, her mind a little confused by the absence of visible pattern or plan.

Looking back, she once told me, she saw many impressions; some clear-cut, gloriously detached, some scudding along, half-smothered in crowds.

She saw life, not as a slow evolution wherein man must follow clues and stumble towards a goal; not as a succession of earnest endeavours, nor even as one long-drawn-out aspiration struggling through spiritual hindrances and material demands. She saw it as a meandering course, mapped out possibly by Fate, but that is no concern of ours; unfolding itself apparently at haphazard, certainly neither forechosen nor deliberately pursued by those engaged in it.

The days and weeks and years are merely the setting in which we must turn our faces to whatever may happen to confront us.

“That is life,” she declared, “whether it be the life of the dilettante or the drudge. And it is useless to expect from life anything different or anything greater.”

CHAPTER IV

FOOL OR KNAVE

WE have had two gardeners in thirty years. The first was an honest fool who could read and write, and the second was an illiterate knave.

As for any of you who love to point a moral and improve the occasion, I warn you that our experience has no message for your ear, because I would recommend our second gardener every time.

If ever mortal gave the lie to a well-accredited motto that mortal was Joe Behenna, and that motto was *experientia docet*. Experience taught him literally nothing, for his ignorance was more wisdom-proof than the omniscience of others. The first frost of the season always found him unprepared ; he invariably watered just before heavy rain, and netted the strawberries after the birds had raided the beds. His repetition of failures was marked by a regularity that would have been almost wearisome in success. He was a mild man with a mild manner, a high-pitched voice and all the negative virtues ; he neither drank nor

swore, nor cheated, and he never lost his temper.

We put chances of self-improvement in his way with dogged perseverance and a hopefulness for which we had no justification in the past. We left *Gardening Illustrated* in the green-house every Sunday, though we might have known that it would not be opened again until Mrs. Behenna laid her fires. We sent him to visit other gardens noted for their high cultivation or for rare plants, and when we questioned him on his return his reply would seldom vary :

“ Well, I noticed as ’ow their cabbages—or their wallflowers—weren’t near so big as ours.”

We sent him to every flower show and he would spend the day standing near his own exhibits to listen for any word of praise ; and when we asked him what he had noticed at the show, he never failed to reply that our things looked very well there.

The potting-shed walls were green with third-class prize cards, for he was incorrigibly proud of these tokens of mediocrity. All his days he was a stranger to the heartaches and the disappointment that attend the career of every gardener. His hopefulness was like a waterproof covering against the showers of adversity, and his soft answers, though they did not always turn away wrath, could hardly fail to provoke despair. These are fair samples of the dialogues in which Joe Behenna,

with his unruffled outlook on failure and mischance, succeeded in having the last word every time.

MASTER (in irate tones). "Behenna, there is not a raspberry left in the place. I told you to net them a fortnight ago, didn't I?"

GARDENER (cheerfully). "Well now, I says to the boy only this mornin', I says I b'lieve they li'l grey birds have begun for ter take off the fruit."

MASTER. "Didn't you spray those apple-trees last week? I told you to give them a good doing over and here's the blight as bad as ever. What strength did you use?"

GARDENER. "Yes, I bin all around them, but it dedn' seem no good to open a new tin this year, so I was a bit sparey like with the wash."

MASTER. "Behenna, all those seedlings in the frame are dead, every one. I don't believe you've watered them for weeks."

GARDENER (soothingly). "Well, now, Loam 'e says to me yesterday they was looking tol'ble whisht, but there now we'll putt them out in the open an' guv them a bit o' dung and they'll come around again. . . ."

The growth and variety of vegetation outside his pots and seed-pans would have rejoiced the heart of a naturalist and his plants provided a perfect haven for every species of noxious insect.

Once we wrote a poetic history of his failures, beginning :

"Who buried the tortoise in the manure heap to keep him warm for the winter?"

"I, Joe Behenna, I buried the tortoise and we never saw him more."

"Who overpruned the nectarines so that they bore no fruit?"

"I, Joe Behenna, I overpruned the nectarines."

"Who starved the bees in winter?"

"I, Joe Behenna, I starved the bees."

But we never finished our childish song, partly because the monotony of the refrain became too comic for the tragic nature of the subject matter, partly because the subject matter itself bade fair to be interminable.

As for the habits and politics of our gardener, the term ultra-conservative might be used in describing both. His appearance had not varied in thirty years; he wore a moss-green bowler and a moss-green coat, an old leather belt that was always sagging over his trousers, and an indifferently white dicky that would not underlie the waistcoat. He was short and thick with mild blue eyes and a square beard, a gentle voice rising to almost feminine tones in the middle of each phrase, and an everlasting movement of his gums, for croust was no mere eleven o'clock with him. All his working hours he seemed to indulge in one long croust, chewing the cud of some invisible relish from eight till five o'clock.

Such was the outer, unchanging aspect of Joe Behenna, with a complete absence of excitement,

haste and enthusiasm in mind or movement ; his range of vitality was confined to a lower key than such emotions would imply, and he never rose above mild surprise and unambitious self-approval.

Nor was his conservatism mere lip-theory ; he expressed it consistently in all his work. The potting shed had never been cleaned out within the memory of our generation ; dead mice, earthy labels, decayed vegetable marrows, seeds half-germinating in rotted pulp, cobwebs, mildew and lichen attached to inanimate objects that, never being shifted, had almost grown into their corners ; these all combined with the usual contents of a potting shed to form a peculiar aroma. Pears were always brought in when they were sleepy, and apples were not considered ready for the table until they were half-decayed. Where the violets had been grown last year, and the year before, there they " belonged to be " and precedent had far more weight in determining the position of the cabbages than any scheme for the rotation of crops. His bulbs in the forcing house, as if unwilling to violate the laws of nature, usually began to bloom the same week as those grown in the open border, while his frame potatoes would invariably lag behind their outdoor brothers.

In one direction, it is true, he reached and maintained supreme excellence, for year after year his double daisies, both red and pink, were the largest in the district ; but there were times when we felt

that this solitary example of successful cultivation hardly justified his existence as a gardener, and then we looked about for means to effect a change. But there was nothing to be done.

He held on always in the even tenor of his way and so unchanging were his habits that it was impossible to detect any new fault, or even any increasing slowness as an excuse for dismissal or pension. He was not any slower than he had been twenty years ago, the fool was no more foolish now than then. We were simply caught in the toils of his conservatism; he "belonged to be" Head Gardener, and Head Gardener he must remain. And at last, in despair, we had to leave our home and garden.

There, with a new master, he occupies his post to this very day. Still you may see him with the green moss on the same bowler, and the smile on his face, perfect satisfaction in his soul and the double daisies in every border. And still, to every inquiry about health and weather he has his old unvarying replies: "Tol'ble well, thank 'ee"; and "Well, I wouldn't say there won't be showers to-day."

Our next garden was on the side of a hill, and we took on John Nicholas Pellow with the place. He was a great strapping fellow quite six feet in his stockings, with sandy hair, red cheeks and a tremulous underlip. This trembling was solitary

token of the weakness that had kept him from school as a youngster and had led to his rejection by medical boards during the Great War. If those army doctors had seen him handling a pick or spade, felling a tree, or hurrying up and down the bottomless valley between his home and our garden, the life of John Nicholas Pellow might have run a different course.

So consistently had he evaded school that he could not read or write a single letter, but, as if disdainful of these artificial props to wit and wisdom, he had sharpened his mind on men and things in a most effectual fashion, and he had in practical affairs all the cunning shrewdness of the unlettered. Nor was he altogether lacking in those more subtle gifts that have full scope in diplomatic circles, or, to use a more vulgar illustration, in running with the hare and hunting with the hounds.

As we had not bought the place, our rights to cut and hack were ill-defined, and our relations with our landlady, if not actually strained, were a little uncertain. We had, however, taken one or two risks both with and without the connivance of our gardener, and I had cut down a *dracæna* that adorned the top of my rock garden and had removed it to the rubbish heap. Shortly afterwards our landlady, his late mistress, appeared, and in our absence called for the gardener to show her round. When we came home, his underlip was more

tremulous than ever, and we thought he had some dreadful tale of woe to relate, but after due patience we got him to tell the story, with suppressed chuckles and many a sidelong glance.

“ I putt ’er all around an’ she ded’n say nawthen ’tall till she comed to the rock’ry, an’ then she looks at me all of a sudden like, an’ she says, ‘ Why, John Nich’las, where be that oal Casina to ? ’ She der deerly love they oal Casinas. An’ I says to her, ‘ Well, my lady, these things der die away very quick sometimes.’ ”

“ Why, John Nicholas,” I said, “ I believe you saw me cut it down myself and didn’t you help to carry it away ? ”

But I got no reply, only an explosion of muffled laughter. “ My Lady,” though no longer boss in the garden, was still the owner of the Pellows’ cottage, and houses were very much in demand at that time.

He was the only gardener I ever knew who was always in a hurry. He seemed to have a craving for work judging by the way he attacked a job and carried it out. There was not much finish or tidiness about any performance of his, but it was invigorating to watch him handle a tool or move on from one task to another. He had his failures, of course. One year the vine-house was full of mildew and we did not have a single grape. “ All along o’ that ’ere daylight bill,” he declared ; and he firmly

believed it. Several times he grafted apple-trees without success, though he always spat on the twig when he had finished, with all the solemnity of any ancient Greek offering a hecatomb to Pallas Athene. Taking him all round, he had an unusually good working knowledge about his plants and trees, and he never spared himself or considered the question of overtime, for his heart was in his work.

There were two or three days in the year, however, when the garden was nothing to him. He had constituted himself unofficial game-keeper of our small domain, and the happiest moments of his spare time were spent prowling round after jays and magpies with an ancient gun. He knew every sett of rabbits in the country-side and every bird in our coverts had been counted many a time. For some days before our first shoot he would be almost useless in the garden, uncertain in his movements, hurrying from one unfinished job to another, forgetful of anything he had been told. We thought it better not to watch his comings and goings too closely, and to this day we have never found out the full tale of the tricks that he employed for luring our neighbours' pheasants into our wood.

On the day itself he would beat through the undergrowth like some great tank, levelling everything in his progress. Nothing would turn him, not even Prospidnick coppice, where he had to wade through furze to the armpits. I have seen

him emerge from the brake, heated, dripping, stuck all over with prickles, more like a bush than a human being, but with happy excitement in every feature. He would pick up the birds and count them as if his life depended on their number, muttering with the blackest looks if anyone missed or did not fire in time.

His sporting instincts were confined to the gun, however, as we discovered one day to our cost, when the hounds met at Croft Handy and found a fox in our neighbour's rape-field; it was in the middle of January, a few days before our final pheasant shoot. We told John Nicholas he could leave his work to go and watch the fun. What ensued is a matter of lasting shame to us, for the M.F.H. was our personal friend before that unlucky day.

They hunted that fox in circles and could not get him away to open country. Our gardener followed their every movement, running up and down the side of the hill, shouting, waving and gesticulating frantically, beside himself with excitement. At last they ran the fox into a narrow strip of wood adjoining the road, and there was every hope of getting him away. We cleared the road and stood at the lower end to give him a chance, while the hounds drew the wood from the other side, working towards the road. Suddenly, with a tremendous crashing of boughs, there tumbled over the hedge a heated, panting, dishevelled object.

“ I turned 'en,” he gasped triumphantly. “ He've gone away back to the rape-field. We bain't goin' ter 'ave all they traapseing over our place, a-scarin' o' the pheasants, an' stankin' through the bushes.”

He had been working that wood like any hound. Too late we realized that there was method in his madness, and that all the afternoon he had been running up and down like a fury, not possessed with the ardour of the chase, but with the persistent design of heading the fox away from the open country which led to our coverts. And he had headed it seven times, nor did they get a run all that day.

If we had looked upon cunning as the ruling passion in his nature we were destined to discover our mistake. After “ My Lady ” sold her cottages the Pellows became the tenants of an unscrupulous landlord. We never encouraged him to tell us of Mr. Trebilcock's iniquities, because he became so tremulous and excitable at the mere mention of his landlord's name that he was quite unfit for work until the subject was dismissed from his mind. One morning, however, he arrived with a paper in his hand for us to read. He would take no denial. It was connected with lease and repairs ; the demands seemed to be of a very exacting nature and it was arranged that he should take a day off and consult a lawyer about it. A day or two later

I asked him what Lawyer Dungey had said. He looked at me as if I had committed some crime, or at the least an unspeakable folly.

"I never went to 'e," he said indignantly. "I we'ant goin' to 'ave Mr. Trebilcock nosin' around an' watchin' me in Tolvern. I went acrosst the water to Pentire."

With the self-protective instinct of an animal, that man had gone where he was not known. Nor would he travel on the main road by the 'bus. No straight and daylight course for him when engaged in law and matched with subtlety. He walked miles round the creek and crossed the ferry, then three more miles and over another ferry, not meeting a creature he knew, or divulging his purpose to a living soul.

"Lawyer Trenhaile he says I dursn't sign that paper nohow," he continued. "He've wroate a strong letter to Mr. Trebilcock. I reckon that'll be a slap in the face for 'en."

A few months later when Mr. Trebilcock was overtaken by a fate that should have wrung sympathy from a stone, I told John Nicholas of his removal to the asylum.

"I der wish 'e'd bin buried in a stone box, putt away alive, that's where 'e did o't to 'a bin yeers ago," he said, and as he spoke he picked up a large slug from a lettuce leaf and cut it clean in two, in his usual fashion, with the garden nippers.

On his trembling features there was such a look of black and bitter hatred, cruel and unrelenting hatred, that I shrank away from the man and I never mentioned Trebilcock's name again.

Of commercial morality our gardener had no idea at all, nor had any other standard of morality a part to play in his life as far as we knew. For all his physical strength he gave one the impression of a man who relied on his wits for strife and conquest, and I think his motto would have been not "Might" but "Cunning is right." In sickness or pain he was an arrant cur, and his emotions had the simple exclusiveness of a child's emotions. One feeling would flood his view to the horizon and the whole world would be black or rosy as the case might be. If you ever told him about any shrewd advice or a successful bargain, he would give you a most extraordinary glance, half angry, half contemptuous. I can only describe it as a black side-long glance, and it seemed to say: "The world is full of sly dogs, curse them; but let 'em come, I'm ready."

In the autumn we used to sell our apples in Tolvern. We would take in a hamper of thirty pounds or so, and one morning I came upon John Nicholas filling the hamper in a peculiarly deliberate, selective fashion. He was emptying our last two trays of Sops in Wine and we knew they were all sound apples. Stopping to observe his method, I

found that he was putting all the small ones at the bottom.

“That’s all very well for you,” I said, “but what about my feelings when I have to stand by in the shop and see them turned out on the floor?”

At which he laughed so much that I thought he would never catch his breath again. Next time he put all the small ones in the middle.

After Christmas a dealer came out and bought them by the hundredweight, the three of us filling hamper after hamper in the dim apple-house. Now and again I could detect the “sly dog” expression on our gardener’s face as he glanced up to see if the dealer were looking the other way, and then put in a half-rotten apple hurriedly. More than once I picked one out, and said in clear tones, “I think that apple has gone off a bit.” If he could have killed me with a look he would have done so then and there, and in the end I gave it up. You could not change him.

Whether cunning sharpens every sense till each is merely a tool for that artful quality I do not know, but I do know that John Nicholas Pellow’s sense of smell was remarkably acute, as the garden boy learnt to his cost. I heard raised voices one day in the potting-shed and a torrent of curses ending on this milder note: “I’ll guv ’ee a good clout over the labbatt yer young varmint.”

Judicial inquiry evoked the following evidence.

The boy had been to the strawberry bed in his solitary dinner-hour while the gardeners went home.

"How do you know that, John Nicholas?"

"When I comed back from dinner I smelled 'en," triumphantly.

"How many strawberries did you eat, Bill?"

"One," tearfully.

"John Nicholas," I said, "you're a loss to the detective force."

And so ill-judged was my remark that he took it as a compliment and grinned with pleasure. Not very long afterwards he was fated to prove his detective art in a matter far more weighty than the loss of a single strawberry.

It was the Christmas Eve when we had shut up house and gone away. John Nicholas, whose duty it was to stoke the greenhouse fire on alternate weeks, usually came over about 9 o'clock, but on this particular evening he was a good deal later. As he walked up the lane that led to the stables he noticed, just beyond the cowman's cottage, a motor-bicycle leaning against the hedge. "My crums," he said to himself, or something to that effect, "there's somethin' goin' on that dedn o't to be."

Like some prowling fox or badger, ears pricked, eyes straining into the darkness and every sense awakened, he shrank into the shadow of the hedge, so that he should not be detected in the starlight.

There he waited for he knew not what, his heart beating violently, his eyes nearly starting out of his head as he peered up and down the lane, uncertain of what to expect, only convinced that stealth and secrecy would give him the advantage in any encounter. Presently he heard the sound of a car coming out of the stables only sixty yards away. Now he was neither musician nor mechanic, but he had an ear trained to differentiate in a second between a familiar and an unfamiliar sound. The noise that he heard was the noise of our engine, therefore it must be our car coming out of the stables and making for the high road. He had rather less than a minute in which to consider what he should do. He rushed to the entrance of the lane, slammed the gate and whistled loudly on his fingers. As the car came near he could see two occupants in the dim light, and he whistled again frantically, yelling, "Come on, boys ; we've got 'em."

The "boys" consisted of the sleeping cowman and his wife, but they served their purpose well, for the men in the car pulled up, leaped from their seats and disappeared over the hedge. John Nicholas gave chase, with how much or little ardour I should not care to say, for he was only one man against two, and there can be no doubt he was fully conscious of the fact. At any rate he soon gave up the pursuit and, after noting the direction they had taken, he returned to the lane.

By this time a light was kindled in the upper room of the cottage, and Mrs. Pill, having first put her head out of the window to ascertain who was moving below, came down to the door to hear the whole story from John Nicholas' trembling lips.

"Well I never did," she said; "my deearr life! I'd 'a bin out afore to help 'ee but I was in under the bed a-lookin' for these 'ere life-preservers, an' Job 'e be gettin' on his clothes so fast as iver 'e can. 'E's that 'ard 'o 'earin' I couldn't wake him nohow. Here Mr. Pellow, you take one o' they life-preservers an' me an' Job 'll keep the other. I 'ad them long o' poor faather when 'e died. No person wudden come nigh 'ee if you've got one o' they in your 'and."

And she handed him a murderous-looking weapon of lead and whalebone, used by the old gamekeeper in many a poaching affray. At this moment Job appeared, more asleep than awake, and the story had to be told all over again. Then Mrs. Pill brought a lantern and the three went out to examine the motor-bicycle, the two men armed with the gamekeeper's heirlooms, and she herself with the kitchen poker. After one look at the bicycle John Nicholas started back as if he had been shot.

"I d' knaw en. I d' knaw en," he cried, and he almost danced with joy. "'Tes that young Trebilcock down to Merry Meetin'. I've catched en

proper. Now 'e'll serve 'is time. I'll larn en, the drunken young labbatt, but I der wish 'twas 'is faather."

The police were on the spot early next morning. They examined the motor-bicycle which had spent the night in Mrs. Pill's kitchen, they examined the broken stable window and the door, they examined all the premises and they went down to Merry Meeting to hear what young Trebilcock had to say, John Nicholas accompanying them like a sleuth-hound following after two steam-rollers. But one must remember that they had only the claims of everyday duty to sharpen their wits, while his intelligence was goaded by feelings of hatred, malice and revenge towards all the Trebilcock family.

The young man came out looking dishevelled and pale, with an eloquent tale of how he had gone to his shed first thing in the morning and discovered the loss of his motor-bike. He showed them the shed and explained that he never kept it locked, that he had been out last night having supper round the corner, that nothing had been heard by the neighbours. He was overjoyed to hear that his motor-bike had been found. What a daring robbery! Not content with one theft to attempt another so near!

"How do 'ee reckon they was goin' to take the motor-bike away?" said John Nicholas suddenly.

“ They’d never ’ave the nerve for one man to drive that car up-country alone, an’ twadden no place big enough for to putt the bike in be’ind.”

Young Trebilcock turned to the policeman and continued his conversation as if there had been no question asked, while John Nicholas prowled about the shed, and, when no one was looking, picked up a small object from a table in the corner and put it in his pocket. When they had left Merry Meeting and were on their way back to the scene of the attempted burglary, he broke out in excited tones.

“ Have ’ee wroate down all the evidence ? ’T’es so clear as daylight now. ’Twadden no perfessional burglar, ’twere young Trebilcock ’isself, the drunken labbatt, an’ ’is friend. You can see the chap’s never been to bed for the night. ’E’s slewed, that’s what ’e is. A purty job ’e made on it. I’d be shamed ef I cudden break in no better’n that. How long do ’ee reckon ’e’ll get ? ”

“ Pellow,” said the senior policeman severely, “ you’d better be careful what you say. There’s not a morsel of evidence to prove young Trebilcock tried to steal your car. He showed us as how he always keeps his shed unlocked, and there was nothing in the world to stop the thief walking in and taking that motor-bike without leaving so much as a trace behind him. You’ll be getting into trouble yourself if you don’t keep your tongue quiet.”

“ Did ’ee set eyes on ’is ’ands ? ” said John

Nicholas, with apparent irrelevance. "Did 'ee see 'em I ax 'ee? No. Why, 'e kep' 'em in 'is pockets all the time. Can 'ee tell me why 'e was afered to show 'em?"

"You'll cut yourself if you're so sharp, Pellow," said the second policeman. "You'd better leave the job to us. 'Tis not the first time we've 'ad to look into such-like cases. Now we're going to have another examination of the stables."

While the colleagues, with puzzled, professional countenances, were stooping over the footprints in the earth below the window, John Nicholas went inside, swung himself on to the high window-sill and began peering into the woodwork.

"Ah!" he said, and there was something dog-like in his snarl of triumph, "now we've caught en. Come up 'ere, come up a minnut."

The portly policeman, assisted from behind and pulled from in front, at last bestrode the window-sill.

"Do 'ee see these 'ere finger-marks on the wood? Now I d'knew that young Trebilcock have bo't an old boat an' he've bin paintin' o' the gunwale red. I seed en wan day las' week. An' did 'ee see 'is right 'and when 'e went for to open the shed door? 'Twas red as blood. Why we've got no such coloured paint in the place here, an' look at this window-sill an' this brush o' paint I picked out o' the pot in 'is shed."

He drew from his pocket a brush with the red paint on it, still wet.

The policemen looked at each other and the elder spoke.

"We must look into this job thoroughly," he said. "You're a bit hasty, Pellow. A fellow isn't caught so easy as you make out. But o' course there may be something in it. It's the very track I've had in my mind all the morning, but you'd do well to keep quiet and say nothing."

During the tedious time before justice took its course, John Nicholas was erratic in his work, incoherent in speech, more tremulous than ever. His excitement literally consumed him like a raging fire, till the man looked quite ill, and when young Trebilcock was at last convicted of attempting burglary it was a positive relief to our minds. We had begun to fear that we should not have a vegetable to eat for the season and the borders were in a sad state of neglect.

When John Nicholas heard of the verdict we expected a wild outburst of eloquence, but instead of that a look of childish contentment overspread his features, a real *Nunc Dimittis* look.

"I der wish that oal fox was 'ere ter see the day," he said. "If I could raise en from the grave I'd do ut this very minnut an' welcome."

Vengeance was his, and he returned to his work

with all the zest of former days and the added serenity of a long considered debt repaid.

I think we always valued him more highly after that episode of the car, for it made us realize that he was indeed no specialized tool, designed by nature for one exclusive purpose. In many another career he might have gained a living or acquired fame, as diplomat, poacher, detective, but fate had made him a gardener, and as our gardener he never failed to render faithful service.

It is true we always made it clear that his interests were coincident with our own. Had there been any divergence between the two, there can be no manner of doubt which would have gone to the wall. Nature sees to the survival of the fittest and John Nicholas Pellow, for all his lack of book-learning, was well adapted to the struggle for existence.

CHAPTER V

ISIDORE RAPP

NOT so very long ago, in the vale of Lanherne, Isidore Rapp was born of middle-aged parents. He had neither brother nor sister and their joy was inexpressible; so they called him Isidore. Rapp was thrown in as an after-thought and it was "Rapp" that spoilt his life. After-thoughts often end like that.

As Isidore went through the world, flower-buds opened joyfully to greet him; and mists floated away, dissolving in his sunny presence; and the birds sang their sweetest songs; and the most beautiful dreams came floating round him like golden dust in a shaft of sunlight.

Always he met people with kind thoughts and willing feet, with sympathetic hands and smiling eyes. Isidore loved to lie on the river bank and to let the water trickle through his fingers, and to feel the grass seed brushing his cheek, and to press the warm earth with his body.

He loved also to be in the wood where dappled patterns of sun and shadow quivered under the

trees, and to watch the tracery of leaves against a clear sky. Often he would shade his dreaming eyes with one hand and gaze up the long white road that led from his father's dwelling, and meditate on the great journeys he would take by that way, and on the great deeds that he would do at the other end. Often he would climb, in fancy, some rugged height, and thence announce to men in clarion tones, loud as thunder and vivid as lightning, the message which burnt so still and clear, deep down in his childish heart.

There came a day when Isidore was reminded that he was also Rapp. Money must be made, days parcelled into water-tight compartments, dreams sold at market value.

Isidore began to publish and his parents lived in comfort. The river flowed on but Isidore no longer dabbled his fingers there. The call of the dusty road and the distant hill was silent for Isidore, and the shadows in the forest were every day like the shadows in the forest on the day before.

Restlessness and excitement crept into his life and dreams were gradually pushed out of it. Still Isidore went on publishing, for instead of dreaming dreams he invented them and wrote them down and nobody knew the difference.

And his parents looked at him proudly and said to each other :

“ How successful he is. He is indeed a true Rapp.”

And Isidore's pen flew faster and faster, and his mind became more and more alert, and over men and things was no longer the beautiful mist that hung there in his young days when he was yet unconscious of being a Rapp.

A day came when he could invent no more dreams and he held his head in both hands and everything was stale and empty. Without his knowing what he was doing his wandering feet led him out to the forest. A very soft breeze played among the leaves, and on the dappled ground the shadows swayed to and fro like growing weeds in water. One blackbird fluted from a low branch, and in his quivering song was all the beauty of that day and many other days.

But Isidore passed by, deaf and blind to those things. Mechanically he counted the green leaves on a twig ; vacantly he watched the swelling throat of the blackbird ; but he did not notice that the flower buds remained unopened as he passed, and that no brightness was reflected in the faces of those who met him on the way.

When Isidore reached home he lay down and slept a deep sleep, and, awaking to the day's work, he did not invent dreams, for that was no longer necessary. In the night he had dreamed inventions, and ever after his pen ran quickly over the paper whenever he rose from sleep.

And the work of Rapp was well reviewed by

many reviewers, and the productions of Rapp were devoured by a large public; while the death of Isidore was known only to the leaves; and to the blackbird in the forest; and to the buds that never became flowers, because they waited always, vainly hoping for that dreamy peace in the face of the dead Isidore.

CHAPTER VI

MISS LILLIECRAPP'S RICHES

“**I** AM an old woman, just over seventy-nine, and my race is nearly run, but I have had a rich life and have enjoyed all my years ; and now, when the call comes for me, it will not come a day too soon. Only those with regrets or unfinished work need fear that call, and I have no regrets, while my work has always been from day to day.”

I put down Miss Lilliecrapp's letter and wondered. She had never travelled, never married, all her seventy-nine years she had lived in that tiny Cornish village. So much I knew, but little more. A rich life ? And still I wondered.

Here are we, my friends and I, whose days have been full of change and movement, complaining about the poverty of our opportunity. What were those riches of which Miss Lilliecrapp wrote in such final manner ? Not outward possessions ; that goes without saying, for the name of Lilliecrapp has never been connected with money. Nor was she, as far as I knew, what they call a cultivated woman.

Even if her interests had been wide, what chance of fostering them had ever come her way? Music? Art? Travel? He would be a brave and hungry man who, destined to live in Trebulet, yet gave his mind to those things. Literature? That remained, of course, and through literature she might have lived vicariously in all those other spheres. But then I had seen her library and I knew there could be no question of outlet in that direction. The book covers told their own tale.

Who was the sage who taught us that he who would travel to gather the wealth of the Indies must carry the wealth of the Indies with him? I began to wonder if his wisdom had penetrated Miss Lilliecrapp's secret; if her riches lay, after all, in her own personality. But then I remembered she was not merely old and withered, she had always been insignificant and angular in appearance, and it was only too clear that physical charm never could have been a part of her riches. And I wondered more than ever.

That was all a long time ago, and it is many a day now since the call came for Miss Lilliecrapp; and I, though I only knew her during the last twelve months of her life, shall ever count myself the richer for that short-lived friendship. Moreover, since I have known her I must always harbour a suspicion that your real riches are what you give and seldom what you gather.

I have heard her described, by those who assign labels after a single glance, as a "hard case," a "little old nut," a "queer fish" and a "tight little body"; and indeed even those who believe in suspended judgment could hardly have indulged high hopes from a first or second view of her person. She was one of those who ought to go through life carrying an emblazoned banner with this motto; "Do not judge by appearances." Curiously enough she not only lived to prove the truth of that warning, but she expressed it more than once in words. I remember her rapping out in that abrupt way of hers, snapping her lips as if she grudged every syllable: "D'you know finest text in the Bible? No? Can't be two opinions. 'Judge not.' Be a better world if we followed that."

As for herself she never judged her fellow creatures or their actions.

At first I knew Miss Lilliecrapp by hearsay, and then came that all too short intercourse, and now there is still the talk and reminiscence of the people of Trebulet, for even after all this time her name is a household word in the little circle where she lived for eighty years. It is not easy to transmit the secret of her riches. It was one of those secrets learnt in patient search, not revealed under a flash of lightning; but it is possible by joining those three sources of information to form a more or less complete picture of her. And the first impression

remains also the last, that, to use her own words again, she had had a rich life.

I do not imply that she exaggerated trifles with dramatic fervour, or that she was one who divined weighty intentions under any trivial act. She was far more truthful and clear-sighted than the spinster aunt who reckoned a proposal whenever a man straightened her antimacassar. There never was anybody with less tendency to exaggerate. Weights and measures can never have been the torment of her childhood, for a due sense of those things was inborn in her. There is no denying that this perfected sense of balance is often to be noticed in the dullest dogs, but then the dull dogs are usually occupied in watching their own footsteps, whereas Miss Lilliecrapp was always looking away into vistas.

In that very first letter of hers she opened vistas. We had discovered a mutual interest in the history of local names and their meaning, and on the strength of that interest she began a correspondence at once. It was a rambling letter, full of suggestion and local colour and trifles that borrowed all their significance from their background. Amongst other things she wrote: "I wish that all farm-houses had their names painted on the gate leading to them. It would add so greatly to the interest of a country walk. If you study the sale notices in the local papers about Michaelmas, you

will find some very interesting names, a perfect mine of information lies there."

Now these two remarks may seem obvious and simple to you, who have mastered the art of bending the particular to the general, but I contend that only a big man or woman can take the very little things of everyday life, and, with a cheerfulness worthy greater happenings, link them on to universal matters. It was just in this direction that Miss Lilliecrapp never lost an opportunity. Nothing was insignificant to her ; she would never pass by or ignore or forget ; everything served her as warning or aid. Her daily life brought fuel to her mind, so to speak ; there were no wasted hours or incidents, and a certain ripeness of nature made her turn everything that happened to the best possible use. She would never hurry over a decision or put an experience behind her, there was nothing of the "lightly come and lightly go" about her, but everything was worked into her life as warp and woof : tragic happenings and humour, windfalls and misfortune. She would weave slowly, surely, for duration, using many-coloured strands.

In her prime, women J.P.'s were unknown, but unofficially she must have exercised a more than magisterial influence in Trebulet for a very long time. Was she not called in over that quarrel in the Treslothan family, when old Squire Treslothan threatened to disinherit his son, John David,

because his daughter-in-law was a pert minx and had contradicted his wife? There had always been a curse on the family that the eldest son should not inherit, ever since old Jonathan Treslothan had turned his bull into the field where John Wesley was preaching. How Miss Lilliecrapp worked the reconciliation nobody ever knew, except the two Treslothans and possibly their two wives. It may be that she called up the ghost of John Wesley, and then incited father and son to banish that restless shade for ever. At any rate the Squire did not alter his will, John David did not emigrate, he only removed with his minx to live a few miles farther away from the old people, and in due time he broke the curse. But people always said that it was really Miss Lilliecrapp who had broken it.

Then there was the day, when, stepping forth to gather blackberries, in her hobnailed boots and her hard hat all on one side, she came on a deadlock in the middle of Churchtown. Mrs. Clemmo, with swelling bosom and arms akimbo, was reiterating :

“ You pluck your own bird or the Squire can be so leary as Uncle Nathan’s cat for all I cares.” And she glared down on her trembling antagonist.

Mrs. Lidgey, with a tear in one eye and an attempt to inflate her skinny person, could only declare to the village pump, to Miss Lilliecrapp, and to the world at large :

"If Mrs. Clemmo's agoin' to ride the 'igh 'orse I shall ride the 'igh 'orse too."

It appeared that the Squire had ordered his Michaelmas dinner as usual from Mrs. Clemmo, who, being gooseless at the moment, had bespoken the bird from her neighbour; but the question of plucking seemed to be one for neutrals.

"Why," said Miss Lilliecrapp, seizing the situation at once, "you'd surely never let any other person pluck your own goose what you've reared in your own place, Mrs. Lidgely."

Mrs. Lidgely's tears were always near the surface and a sense of pity for the goose quickly directed her footsteps to the yard, while Miss Lilliecrapp turned to the other.

"And you the quickest plucker in the countryside, Mrs. Clemmo. You'll be losing your good name, I'm thinking, if the Squire hears you've put your plucking out."

She hurried after Mrs. Lidgely, and that goose nearly shared the fate of Solomon's baby as one lady attacked the neck and one the tail, but it was plucked to the last feather.

Miss Lilliecrapp was never one who carried soup to the poor or read the Bible at bed-sides, but she was fairy godmother to nearly every illegitimate baby in the village, and that was no figure of speech, as those acquainted with Trebuletts can testify. Moreover, she was famed for her herb decoctions,

and in cases of internal trouble the sovereign remedy was to send around to her for a drop of Tansy tea, or "Fevverfoe," or elder wine. She certainly saved the life of Benny Nankivel. He had the "hooting-cough somethin' ter'ble." Twice he had been taken across the water at low tide and once given a dose of shot and oil to stop the "risin' o' the lights," but still he whooped and whooped despite every remedy and the Nankivels were "in a pretty poar" when Miss Lilliecrapp was called in and revived the child by her timely change of ministration.

She must have been born with a key to the world of plant and flower, like the prince in the story who understood the language of birds. She had only to stick a cutting in anyhow and it would flourish, and her garden had always a happy, well-tended look. She knew the property and virtue of every plant and the haunts and habits of all the wild flowers in the country-side. On the school holidays and on Saturday afternoons she would be seen with a crowd of children following at her heels or straying round her, peering into the hedges, leaning over a gate to gaze across the fields or looking into roadside pools. She taught them to be familiar with every hedge and coppice where the kellas grew, and to use the good, old-fashioned names for all the treasures they brought home; the hollensmocks, the bannel, the guckoos and the

drill-drolls, the scaow, the haymaiden and the countryman's-treacle, the aglets and the lizzamoo. She it was who encouraged James Lewarne to write his Flora of the county, for she placed her time and knowledge at his disposal, till his paper on the Trebullett flora made such a stir that he was inspired to explore a wider area.

But she never wearied the children with her love of flowers. She knew how to catch and hold their attention with little stories, how to invest every animal and insect with a halo of interest, how to thrill them with the life-story of angleditch, muryan, want and horse-adder, even of the john-jaick, the appledrane and grammersow.

"John-jaick, John-jaick, putt out your long horn," you would hear them chanting as they followed her past the old wall at Keneggie.

And when they came to the dilapidated mine stack near Trenwheal they would look up and sing :

"Airy-mouse, airy-mouse, fly aroun' the King's house,
A crust of bread for airy-mouse."

She it was who, long before the day of bird-watchers, appointed herself guardian of the choughs and ravens that nest on Menabilly headland ; who, by the force of her personal conviction alone, made it a deed of shame for any Trebullett boy to strub a nest. And to this day her love of birds and of

the old names is alive in the district, and you may hear on the lips of those children, who are men and women now, the words gladdie, apple-bird and whinnard, budpecker, ekky-mowl and pedn-paley.

In all these spheres of influence there was never anything official or regulated about her proceedings. Nearly all her performance was effected by some speechless power that emanated from her, and to save her life she could not have preached a sermon or articulated her individual creed. Often she would shut her mouth like a trap just when you looked to her for eloquence, and her remarks, whatever depth of wisdom they betrayed, were nearly always made in a snappy fashion.

She was never guilty of airing her opinions or of lecturing any listener, but sometimes a chance remark would provoke sudden fireworks from her, as if you had touched a secret spring with your thumb. Even now I can never hear the word "democratic" without remembering such a moment. Miss Lilliecrapp and I were talking of the last village Social, and I observed, in all innocence :

"Mrs. Treslothan is not democratic enough on these occasions ; she is sticky with the people."

"Democratic ? " she snapped. " I've no patience with the word. Undiluted nonsense they talk now. Democratic manners indeed ! Deliberate talking

down, as if they were lesser beings than ourselves. Either Mrs. Treslothan is natural or she is not. One person's as good as another. I've no use for this conscious condescension. Too much talk and pose nowadays."

It puzzles some to know how people ever got inside the ring-fence of her manner, but there was a certain genuineness that called like deep unto deep through all the outer characteristics, so that she nearly always got the best out of people after they had once recoiled from the shock of her abruptness. And of course she always gave the best. No one who knew Miss Lilliecrapp could question that. She identified herself with the life of the place and all her days she was giving out, giving out, without ever stopping to think, "Am I called upon to do this?" or "Does he or she deserve that?" She just went wherever trouble or sickness or necessity was, and always when she took her leave she left easier, happier people behind her.

"Words, words, words," you will say, "and we are no nearer the secret of Miss Lilliecrapp's riches than before."

Well, I despair of it. I told you it was not easy; and I have failed. But my conviction remains. And only yesterday Mrs. Penaluna's sour face lit up at some remark of mine and she said: "Oh, you knew Miss Lilliecrapp, too? We don't see the likes o' she nowadays."

No one had ever suspected that old woman could smile, and I think you must agree that Miss Lilliecrapp's riches have not altogether perished with her.

CHAPTER VII

SEA MEMORIES

LONG after the traditions of men have faded, the rocks of Ponsharden Bay will guard their own peculiar memories, and when all tales of wreck and smuggling are but the literary echoes of a half-mythical age the cliffs of Ponsharden will look seaward with their age-long frown and say : " Here is the cave where Sammy Boase looked his last (was it only yesterday ?) on the world of sunshine ; here the very waters where Cap'n Joe Treggiddo outwitted the slaves of law and order for the nineteenth time ; and here, at my feet, the shingle beach where old Luke Spargo harvested many a wave-borne treasure."

Who shall deny to rock and stone a memory of the past ? And where, if not in the silence of those unchanging crags, should Time preserve his oldest stories ? Let the grim headland speak for itself.

" It was blowing a gale from the east and all the bay was in turmoil. As I looked out towards the Nare there was nothing unmoved in all the world but myself. White foam crested every wave, the

very foundations of the bay vibrated with those ocean-travelled billows. The *Mary Jane* was visible at one moment and lost in a trough of water the next. Even the Nare, my stolid rival across the bay, was wreathed in scuds of flying vapour. After every boom I gave forth a deep-sounding echo, as if to reassure the storm: 'All right. Carry on. I stand firm; work it off on me.' There was no question of the *Mary Jane* being able to land her cargo in the little cove that I guard. She was driving on towards me on her usual course, keeping the Enys rock on her port bow, but I well knew that while that east wind raged nothing could be done. Men had collected on my summit and were looking down anxiously on the rocks below me, rocks that were now exposed like hungry fangs and anon hidden in a torrent of curdled water. I could feel them talking in excited tones and pointing to a vessel that had just appeared round the Nare and was following, as best it might, in the course of the *Mary Jane*. Then the two boats began describing circles round each other like curious or angry curs.

"As far as I can remember, things went on like this for hours and the day grew old. The wind blew as ever and the sea became, if anything, more ungovernable. From the look of the sky one could foretell an all-night gale. Late in the afternoon the second vessel changed her manœuvres, headed right

away from the *Mary Jane* and disappeared round the Nare. She was evidently making for Gue Graze harbour. I could read that vessel's mind as clearly as I hear the seagulls scream in the air below my ledges. That revenue officer was sure of his prize, but he was not going to incur a night's discomfort in dogging the *Mary Jane*. She was safe enough. She could do nothing in such a gale and she was not likely to unlade her precious cargo in any other port.

"No sooner had the little enemy run clear of the bay than a strange thing happened among the group of men on my summit. They ceased talking, as if on a sudden command, and the whole party, except Luke Spargo, hurried inland, some making for the furze brake that drops behind me to Bozion valley, and three or four to Jolly Town farm that guards the sky-line half a mile away. Luke stepped back to a grassy knoll whence I command the whole world of moorland, sea and sky; standing there he began to make frantic signals to the *Mary Jane*. She came in a little closer and then I could see Cap'n Joe Tregidgo put the helm hard down and stand off from the seething waters below me. Old Luke never left the mound but kept turning his face and waving his arms towards Jolly Town farm and then back again to the *Mary Jane*.

"Presently there were voices and a crowd of men, women, and children came up from Bozion

valley dragging great bundles of furze roped together by their crooked stems. Then the men returned from Jolly Town with half a dozen farm labourers carrying stout ropes coiled and slung like life-belts from one shoulder to the other hip.

“ I shall never forget the scene that followed. The daring of it all made me feel insignificant. Never in the history of the world had men shown anything but submission before my rocky frontage, never had they dared approach me but with a caution very near to reverence. And now they had not only conceived but executed the plan of letting down furze fenders as thick as the length of a short man's body, so that the *Mary Jane* might safely hug my impregnable, wave-worn, jagged base. There is just one break in the toothed rocks below, where I drop, from a plateau, to deep water. This plateau, lying a little to the north-east of my head and some two hundred feet below Luke's mound, had never been reached but by the hardest men and boys in search of sea-birds' eggs ; the only access to it was by a track about as wide as one strand of a cobweb, winding down my rocky side.

“ The *Mary Jane* pulled close in. I could see her rising and falling, scraping her gunwale against the furze. At one moment her decks were nearly level with the top of the plateau, the next moment the waves would suck her down, down, nearly out of sight. But they did the deed. One by one

those men and boys came up the spider path with the barrels, the women above holding on grimly and obeying every order from below to slacken or tighten the ropes they held. Three of the casks were lost ; they went down through the air like feathers, the rum was swallowed up by those thirsty waves, and the shattered hoops and chips went floating off like corks on the foam. But, except for those three, Cap'n Joe Tregidgo landed the whole of his cargo before dark, and Luke Spargo and his mates laid out all the barrels on the close turf.

“ Truly I vibrated with activity and a new life. During those strange moments I felt as if I had lost my accustomed firmness and was unresting with strife like the sea and wind ; for I had an end to attain, I was lending all my strength to further a brave purpose. Men like ants were running all over me, women and children covered me, in group and line. Casks were laid out one after another on my broad summit. Nothing about me was lonely, not a crevice or pinnacle was undisturbed. Only my foundations were secure from intrusion, and the gale was assaulting them with unabated fury.

“ At last the *Mary Jane* pushed off into the bay, the fenders were drawn up and carried off, the ropes coiled and taken back to the farm, the casks hoisted into one cart after another, each one being driven

up the green track from Bozion valley. I watched the carts winding away on the Tregeagle road till it was dark. When the last one had been loaded, Luke Spargo said: 'Drive away, Sonnie, an' doan't 'ee stop for old Nick hisself, not avore they barrels be safe to Jamaica Inn.'

"Jamaica Inn, I have heard them say, is twenty miles from here, in the heart of the moors, and the deep black bogs there are more safe and secret than any cellar.

"All that night the storm raged, but somehow I was less aware of it when no little men were pattering about me, their fragility in strange contrast with the imperious power of wind and sea. Left alone I could feel myself, as ever, the central part of the storm, the deep-rooted base on which all things created rest. Knowing this, I was well content, and, conscious of my purpose, I could not feel alone. As darkness grew thinner I felt the strength of the gale waning. Against the first streak of light on the horizon I could see the cutter coming round the Nare once more. Cap'n Joe Tregidgo had anchored in the bay and he seemed in no hurry to leave. I could not actually hear the human voices in the interview between the two vessels, but water is a sensitive medium and I have seen so many generations of seamen live and fight and smuggle and die that I understand their ways as if they were my own.

“The Captain of the little enemy muttered between closed teeth, ‘I’ve got yer, yer cunning old varmint. You’ve run yer head into the noose at last.’ And hailing the other Captain, he came close and boarded the *Mary Jane*. The search was short and thorough. Old Cap’n Joe remained on deck throughout, in his mouth a clay pipe from which no smoke issued. He never shifted a foot but stood in the bows gazing out to sea, as if nothing on this side of the horizon were worthy of his attention. When the other left the *Mary Jane*, with a grunt that was neither articulate curse nor threat, though it may have been intended for both, Cap’n Joe never raised nor lowered his eyes. For final greeting he spat over the bows and jerked his chin once sideways, then back again. That was all

“From beginning to end of that adventure I watched the men of the *Mary Jane* with admiration, as I always watch the seamen at their work. There is about their thoughts a deep silence and their purpose is unchanging. Luke Spargo and his landsmen run and chatter, but they brave no winter tempests, in their very boldest enterprise they tread firm ground and every night they sleep quietly in their beds. The sailormen have a far-seeing look in their eyes, they are more deeply rooted than the ordinary human being. I am sure that they have borrowed from their journeying in far seas some

of the ruggedness of the elements ; I always feel that Cap'n Joe Tregidgo and his like are men of my own breed.

“ As for Luke Spargo, I have watched him as child and youth and man. When a youngster he was continually on the beach, early and late, and as an old man he always gave the orders for landing a cargo or dividing spoils. He had black eyes that would look into the heart of any storm. Whenever a wreck came in, or a fragment of one, there was Luke in waiting, as if guided to the spot by some strange gift of scent or prescience. He had his share in many a glorious encounter with wind and wave and preventive men, and many a glorious wreck, from the *Highflier* down to the *Berlin* of happy memory.

“ The *Highflier* ran ashore on Christmas Eve in the winter of the blizzard, providing flannel for every man, woman and child within sound of Bozion Church bells, for many a year to come.

“ The *Berlin* struck the Enys rock in a fog ; she had a cargo of flour, and the salvage officers said that the people of Trewedna might take any sack that was washed up in a torn condition. There are but fifty souls in Trewedna, or thereabouts. Next tide every bag washed in was torn and the people came hurrying like waves, every one with jug, basin, or pillow-slip. They covered the beach like black ants ; but when the officers appeared again

the sand was white as with giant snow-flakes, for the damaged empty sacks lay everywhere.

“ Many a summer evening Luke would come and stand on my mound as huer to the fishing-boats, and no one was more prompt to mark the shadow in the water or to signal the school of pilchards. His eyes seemed to have a wider range and a quicker action than any human eyes I ever saw. So many hundred times I have heard his voice ring out over the bay, that I never hear the cry of ‘ Heva ’ now without thinking that Luke has come back again. The very last time that he came to the mound with uneven, dragging footsteps, he sat and gazed upon the *Hibernia*. She had run right on to the Nare overnight, in a gale. He looked at her regretfully and murmured to himself, ‘ Aye, but she’d ’a bin a beautiful wreck if she’d a ’ad a cargo.’ Luke never saw another wreck. I always wonder if that disappointment hastened his end. But at any rate he had reached a good old age and he had lived a life with many an excitement and triumph. Unlike poor Sammy Boase.

“ Sammy Boase’s cave is about half-way between the Nare headland and the middle of Ponsharden Bay. I have watched that cave for centuries, long before the name of Boase was ever heard in Trewedna, long before Trewedna ever had a name at all. It is my hour-glass by which I read the tides at a glance. At low tide it is long and narrow, like

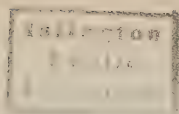
a blackened streak of lightning or a cruel scar in the rock that faces me, and at high tide it is just a little dark door. Sometimes I can hear the winter billows booming there with a hollow, reflux sound. Sometimes, when sunlight dances over the unrippled blue water in the bay, the wet rocks on either side of the cave glisten like jewels.

"It was on just such a day of summer sunshine that Sammy Boase set out for his last sail. The bells of Bozion were calling every one to morning church, but he was young and heedless, and then, too, he was keeping company with Farmer Laity's daughter. Prudence held the tiller, Sammy pushed off from the cove and jumped in. I watched them hoist the sail and go gliding across the bay. I saw them take down the sail as they drew near the cave. Sammy put out one oar over the stern and paddled gently in. The darkness swallowed them. There was room enough and to spare for the mast as they entered, but the level of the cavern roof takes a drop, I believe, about half-way in. The tide was low and all that morning I was lost in contemplation of the winged life on the shore, waders seeking food and gulls at rest, every form reflected in the wet sand; or I was watching the points of light dancing on every untroubled wave.

"When the cavern entrance was once again a little door, I remembered suddenly that the happy couple and their boat were still inside. I must have

seen them had they left the cave ; one detects in a moment any human movement on the rhythmic spaces of the sea, for there is always something jerky and spasmodic about the ways of men. Hours had passed, long hours. Had they fallen asleep, forgetful of time and tide, lulled to rest by the gentle lapping of the water on the rock, with the rising of the tide that none can resist and none can understand ? Surely long ere this he had told her all the story of his love.

“ No one will ever know about their end. The boat was found next day at the bottom of the cave, resting under the green water, the mast just rising into the air, with a scar on the top where it had pressed into the cavern roof, driven up and up by the rising tide. The bodies were washed ashore on Trewedna beach. Sammy came first and then Prudence. And the bells of Bozion tolled for a double burying.”



CHAPTER VIII

STORMS IN A TEA-CUP

I

The Rehearsal

THIS is the story of a Women's Institute ; or part of the story. The little village on the creek looks peaceful enough as it lies there facing the mud flat, the crying curlews, the white gulls congregated on the reef and the deer-park across the water. In the park Scotch firs rise from the red bracken, which glows, after rain, as if it were luminous. The houses in the village have not a sociable appearance, for they extend in three straight lines : the Terrace ; the Upper Terrace ; the Back Terrace. Social distinctions correspond. No one, looking down the creek on a sunny day, would guess what heart-burnings, what preparations for battle, what stormy encounters took place in Pollyjoke between Christmas Eve and New Year's Day in the year 19—.

The central figures of this modern Iliad were the Varcoe family of Pollyjoke House ; peaceful enough

citizens, but it was on their devoted heads that the storm clouds burst.

Mr. Henry is Churchwarden, School Guardian and general referee. He has no ostensible occupation, but quite enough work falls to his share, for if ever a doubtful question or an unpleasant job is to be tackled, some one says: "Oh, Mr. Varcoe will know"; or "Mr. Varcoe will settle that."

He is a mild-featured, middle-sized man, with a drooping fair moustache, and his hands hang limply at his side; he has an air of always moving on to help some one else.

Mrs. Varcoe is a fine figure of a woman, massively built, with dark flashing eyes, dark brows, an erect presence and the temerity of a mouse. If mind really does preponderate over matter, Mrs. Varcoe is not a living instance of the truth, for a more unassuming nature never inhabited an ample frame. There is something elemental about her. She looks out on the world and sees it in broad simple lines. In everyday life her imagination does not range over wide fields; but in times of trouble people come to her and find all that they want. The very grasp of her big hand is a tonic. Her affection is no light thing; she appreciates warmth and love, and sleep and laughter, and she is an excellent cook; but things such as critical analysis, poetry, self-questioning and regret are outside her ken. She has more uncalculating kindness than all the

other Pollyjoke people can boast between them.

Their only daughter, Eugenia, has lived a good deal with grown-ups, and her ears are too long. She is well-meaning, but too intelligent for her age.

Before Christmas Eve, preparations for the Women's Institute Social were in full swing. The Mrs. Jarley's Waxworks Sub-Committee was hard at work. The Light Refreshments Sub-Committee had begun to talk. Every member might bring two friends, and all ex-service men had been sent invitation cards. No official list of them could be found, but Mr. Varcoe supplied one from memory, and was held responsible for any feeling roused by omissions. Many people knew how Mrs. Jarley should be done, but no one would consent to play the part; so the youngest member was informed that she must "do" Mrs. Jarley. This was Sophie Dingle, aged sixteen, not yet self-conscious and decidedly gifted in comic dialect.

The rehearsals began.

Mr. Varcoe lent his drawing-room and effaced himself; his dining-room was piled with cardboard boxes. The Committee was small and active. Each had a special line with which her neighbours might not interfere. The President, who was "bossing the show" as she called it, or "organizing the tableaux" as the Committee termed it, was slow in discovering this fact, but when she did so her difficulties were greatly lessened.

Miss Liddicoat lived two miles away and had no real understanding of the inner life of Pollyjoke. She was dark, friendly and impatient, exuding energy at every pore, but she had never before presided over anything or anybody, and was a little uncertain about the qualities needed for the post. She was too quick, and this sometimes saved the situation, for she could not become involved in tangles that escaped her notice ; at other times it led her into difficulties. Then she would hasten to the next thing, leaving the problem to solve itself.

Her position as President was rather like Mrs. Carlyle's position as the wife of Thomas, similar to that of a weather-cock in a gale. She was at the mercy of every wind that blew and ignorant of the compass ; full of theories with little experience and no presidential qualities except a genial manner ; nor even a very clear notion of what an institute should be ; only vague ideas about universal friendliness and social equality. Rather a subversive theory for Pollyjoke with its three Terraces. She would fly down to the village, say a word here and there, and imagine she had "fixed" things. It was a new habit to Pollyjoke people, who preferred to think before they spoke, and who always looked before they leaped, if indeed they ever leaped at all.

At this first rehearsal the President was talking

to several people at once. Placing Britannia (Mrs. Varcoe) on a stool, she cast a Union Jack about her ; at the same time she flung *The Old Curiosity Shop* together with *Martin Chuzzlewit* at Sophie's head.

" You study those, Sophie, and you'll be all right. Just read up Mrs. Gamp. She and Betsy Prig will make a tableau. And the witches from *Macbeth*. You might learn that too. ' Double, double, toil and trouble,' you know."

Sophie looked utterly bewildered, but Miss Liddicoat did not observe it, for she was tangled in the folds of a flag.

Suddenly a murmur was heard :

" Mrs. Kneebone always does the draping you know, she understands it."

The President absorbed this piece of information at a gulp, quickly assumed a helpless air and turned to the doctor's wife :

" Now, what do you think about this, Mrs. Kneebone ? "

From that moment Mrs. Kneebone did all the staging, grouping and draping, as she had done for Christmas entertainments from time immemorial. For she also is an old inhabitant, and no one would dream of draping a waxwork in her presence. Thus Nature makes her specialists ; one man, one job ; no one may move on or change in Pollyjoke.

While Mrs. Kneebone was grappling with a child's helmet which perched on Britannia's head

like a tea-cup, while Britannia looked down at her display of naked arm with a rueful glance, Sophie began to voice her troubles in shrill tones. Now Sophie Dingle shines in comedy, with a falsetto voice, as a vulgar old woman stuffed with pillows. She has played the part with great applause ever since she was nine years old. But no one had ever told her anything about Mrs. Jarley, and the luckless child, dressed in a matronly black silk gown with a fichu and a poke bonnet, was trying to make her talk as genteel as her garments ; and the words would not come.

“ What am I to say ? If some one will tell me what to say I can learn it,” she implored.

Miss Liddicoat’s heart sank. Who could invent patter for this motley collection of figures, ranging from Miss Muffet to Macbeth ? Yet something must be done.

Suddenly another murmur rose :

“ Miss Bertha always has an idea.”

Miss Bertha Tallack represents pure intelligence in the village. Execution, no ; conception, yes. Just as Eugenia is always local treasurer because she has a “ turn ” for figures ; just as Nellie Dingle plays the man in theatricals because she is tall and thin, and can carry off Mr. Dingle’s 1885 frock-coat with an air ; so, on account of her intellect, is Miss Bertha inevitably spokeswoman in every assembly. She is a many-sided woman. She has studied

Esperanto and corresponded (on postcards) with Laplanders and Chinamen. She reads French novels and is a member of the Royal Institution where, once a year, she meets all the scientific people in the county. Behind her rather quizzical eyes, her rather aggressive chin, her sarcastic turn of phrase, lies a kind heart and one of the most independent judgments you could find. Angular perhaps, but incorruptible. It is possible that she acts as destructive agent oftener than pioneer, but she would tell you her critical habits are the outcome of life in Pollyjoke where so much dry rot accumulates; and none of these tendencies really matter, for they are balanced by a great gift. She can turn and laugh at herself.

Miss Bertha sat down in a corner, pencil in hand. In five minutes she had produced a book of words, comments on each tableau, appropriate and pithy. Meanwhile things hung fire a little and Britannia was heard murmuring to herself:

“I don’t know whatever has come over Sophie; she can do better if she tries. No, I can’t say anything, she would only cry. I do wish the child’s mother was here. She’d tell her to wake up and be funny. She’d make her do it.”

After some hours, during which Mrs. Kneebone draped, the lay figures posed, Miss Bertha criticized and the President hovered about pushing people on and off an imaginary stage, the rehearsal came to

an end. Every one congratulated every one else and declared :

“ Things are going very well.” The waxworks dispersed, Mrs. Jarley returning home rather tearful, with instructions from Britannia to be more natural and vulgar next time.

Then all went serenely till the eve of the great event.

II

Battle

On the last Sunday in the year, outside the church, Eugenia came to the President with a troubled face.

“ Mother has a note for you. There’s bad news.”

Rushing into Mr. Varcoe’s house she found Britannia standing by the fire, dressed for church, with a shrunken expression as if some one had squeezed the vitality out of her. She handed over a letter and wrung her hands.

“ I don’t know whatever we shall do. Mrs. Carmino’s in an awful state. I don’t know what has come over her. She says the service men must pay for their food. It’s all in the minutes. I went round last night and told her we all said the men couldn’t possibly pay. She’s up in arms about it. Why, we’ve invited them ! Eugenia says the

minutes are wrong and she never wrote them down till after the meeting."

"Drat Eugenia!" replied Miss Liddicoat.

Now Mr. and Mrs. Jeremiah Carmino are newcomers in Pollyjoke, but despite that fact they command a certain respect, for they are related to the Carminos of Carmino Manor. This is a beautiful example of the balance of nature, who gives with one hand what she takes away with the other.

"You can't accuse Mrs. Carmino of cooking the minutes," she pursued. "She'd resign at once. And then what would happen to the Institute? No one else would take it on. No doubt she did cook them; but we must take some other line. I do not see what line. But that would be an insult. What a worry."

Miss Liddicoat was temporarily nonplussed.

Britannia rambled on with the inconsequence of genuine emotion:

"I said to her, I said, 'My dear Mrs. Carmino, let yourself cool down and don't write that letter to the President till you're feeling better.' She's been awful, my dear Miss Liddicoat, I can't tell you what she was like. What ever shall we do?"

Miss Liddicoat perused the letter again and exploded.

"She didn't cool down. How priceless! I never read such eloquence. Never. No comma or full-stop. 'Perchance as I am only the Secretary

my opinion is not asked, but——’ Oh, Mrs. Varcoe, what a joke!”

But Mrs. Varcoe saw no joke. Her dark features were heavy with gloom as she urged the President to go and see the Secretary at once.

So Miss Liddicoat hurried along the Terrace and burst in on Mrs. Carmino and wrung from her a reluctant consent to summon a Committee meeting, on the plea that public opinion was leaning towards Free Refreshments for the service men.

The church bells were ringing and Mr. Jeremiah was waiting, so Mrs. Carmino had no time to express herself. They all arrived late in church. The President was in no Sunday frame of mind, and all through the Litany Mrs. Varcoe’s refrain kept ringing in her ears:

“My dear Mrs. Carmino, let yourself cool down a bit before you write that letter.”

She returned home after church, having set Eugenia to distribute Committee notices. It was best to quit that surcharged atmosphere and come in with a fresh mind on the morrow.

The day dawned with bright sunshine and a white frost. No sign of conflict appeared along the Terrace as eleven members of the W. I. Committee approached the Council School. Only a close observer might have noticed that each face was a little drawn, as if gathering itself to meet some shock. Eugenia had not distributed the notices in

silence. The President, being under the impression that her first duty as such was to see both sides of every question, always assumed a veneer of friendliness to opponents, and before offering battle to the Secretary went to call for her in a friendly way. Thus it was that these two arrived at the meeting, if not arm in arm, at any rate smile alongside smile.

There was silence as the members ranged themselves round the infant's room. The President and Secretary sat side by side on the sunken inkpots of a desk, their toes just touching the ground. Eugenia had orders to keep silence, but her ears were pricked. Miss Liddicoat put her hands in her pockets and, looking at the floor, began :

“ There seems to be some difference of opinion about the refreshments. I was absent last meeting, but our Secretary tells me that it stands written in the minutes, ‘ Refreshments to be paid for.’ Several people, however, had the impression that the soldiers and sailors were to be free. So it seemed best to call this committee and discuss the question again.”

A pause. Every one was looking at the floor now. The President suddenly remembered that in a Women's Institute one person is as important as another, and resolved that each member present should voice an opinion even if she held none.

“ What do you think about it, Mrs. Dingle ? ”

" I certainly thought the men were not to pay," said Mrs. Dingle firmly.

" What do you think, Mrs. Knuckey ? "

On principle Mrs. Knuckey always voted with the majority. She answered without hesitation :

" I think the men should have their food free."

" What do you think, Mrs. Chynoweth ? " This to an impassive looking farmer's wife who replied reluctantly, as if the answer were being dragged out of her :

" I don't think the men did ought to pay."

And so on till it seemed as if the Secretary's hopes were being knocked down like ninepins, while she sat silently accepting defeat. Eugenia was heard murmuring something about the Minutes. The President broke in, knocked down another opinion and drowned Eugenia's voice. Another pause.

Then the storm broke as Mrs. Carmino stood up. Now, Mrs. Carmino is an uncertain quantity. She is hospitable at home and hearty at functions, but between whiles she never takes the trouble to know anyone in Pollyjoke or to be known. She is a large woman, but less impressive than Mrs. Varcoe because she is not so dark. The only undisputed fact about her is that her husband belongs to a " county family." He is always known as Mr. Jeremiah, not that Pollyjoke people are intimate with him, but they like a Biblical name.

When Mrs. Carmino raised her voice there was

some curiosity in the attitude of her listeners. She said, or rather shouted :

“ I consider these proceedings absolutely out of order. Ask any public person you know if it is possible for a small Committee to revoke a decision made at a General Meeting.”

The silence grew tense, for every one knew that Mr. Jeremiah served on the County Council Roads and By-ways Sub-Committee.

“ I can't help thinking,” said the President, “ that since our Committee was elected by the whole Institute it has, presumably, the confidence of the whole Institute, and is entitled in an emergency like this, where there is no time to call a general meeting to rescind a decision involving the expenditure of not more than thirty shillings, reckoning that each service man will eat and drink sixpennyworth.” Here she broke off, realizing that her sentence was long and involved, though her thought was clear and simple ; such a discrepancy had occurred before, but it was always a surprise to her.

“ You will find that when food is given people always eat twice as much as when they pay,” said Mrs. Carmino, and her cynical smile appeared.

“ There are seventy-five men, counting the wives,” said Eugenia.

“ That is a mere detail,” said Miss Liddicoat, looking over Eugenia's head.

The last two remarks were merely undertones to the discussion which was now raging round soldiers and sailors and conscripts and volunteers and wives and sisters and the relative food value of sausage-rolls and saffron buns.

In Pollyjoke Committee meetings, as elsewhere, the majority kept silence on all vital questions, but directly some insignificant matter came up they would swoop over it like hungry kites, split it into a thousand details and bandy it to and fro till it was lost in infinitesimal fragments, or till their desire for speech was satisfied.

Mrs. Carmino's voice emerged at last from the conversational whirlpool. She obtained silence by reading the disputed minutes in icy tones :

"Refreshments to be paid for. Now," triumphantly, "what have you to say to that? I consider that I, as Secretary, am responsible to the Institute for the carrying out of that resolution."

Mrs. Kneebone murmured peacefully :

"I think what really happened was that only after that resolution was passed did the question of inviting the soldiers arise, and most of us took away the impression that the soldiers would not be asked to pay."

The bewildered President was just about to follow up this clue when Mrs. Carmino broke out again :

"If the soldiers pay, why don't we all pay and our friends? Where is the difference? In Carmino

we never had a social where they didn't pay. Are the soldiers going to have free meals for evermore, may I ask ? ”

A shudder ran through the little assembly, a speechless shudder, but eloquent. Only one person was equal to the challenge : from the corner where she sat, the eyes of Pure Intelligence spat fire. Pollyjoke breathed again. Miss Bertha was going to speak. All through the meeting she had been sitting there, crouched like a cat, wasting no words, biding her opportunity. It had come. She rose and spoke without hesitation :

“ The difference seems to me obvious. These men are our honoured guests. It is the first time that they have had any public recognition in Pollyjoke. You would hardly invite guests to supper and then expect them to pay for their food. I should have thought there could not be two opinions on the matter.”

And Pure Intelligence sat down.

The Secretary was gathering her thoughts to mass them for reply, while the President was thinking :

“ Of course the whole thing's a farce. It was a foregone conclusion. But one had to give the Secretary her innings. They seem to have had a good go all round now. Nearly scratched each other's eyes out. I should think they're ready for a breather.”

Rising, she said, with an attempt to clothe these thoughts in presidential language :

" It seems to me that this matter has now been sufficiently ventilated. We had better proceed to take the vote. Those in favour of the soldiers paying, please hold up their hands."

A heavy pause. Mrs. Carmino alone held up her hand.

" Those in favour of free refreshments for the soldiers."

Nine hands were raised. Only Nellie Dingle and Mrs. Carmino refrained ; but Nell was very young and thereby hangs another tale. The President breathed again and said, with forced cheeriness :

" We'll leave the Food Committee to settle their business while we see about the stage."

She felt ten years younger. It seemed that the battle was won and that the Secretary was " all right " in spite of it. She was mistaken. As the two Sub-Committees were disentangling themselves, Mrs. Carmino's clear tones were heard :

" I shall have nothing to do with the Refreshment Committee. I don't approve of their action. I give it up altogether." And then, in a cynical undertone : " I'm not sure about giving up the Secretaryship too."

Only Miss Liddicoat heard this last threat and it sent a chill through her veins. Rows ; resignations ; women's quarrels ; public scorn. Death to the

W. I. And she herself had been one of the prime instigators.

For a moment she was frozen into inaction. Only for a moment. Collapse of the catering department on the eve of the social; that was the immediate danger. Let the others come later one by one. She went up to Mrs. Varcoe and said in low tones:

"Look here, Mrs. Varcoe, you've got to take charge of the Food Committee and push things through. Yes, you can. You must. You know all about food. Mrs. Carmino won't have anything to do with it. No, she's quite impossible. Here, wait a minute and I'll get you the lists. She hasn't gone yet." And she went up to Mrs. Carmino with an air of indifference. "Mrs. Carmino, I wonder if you would let me have the list of food each member promised to give?"

"Certainly," said Mrs. Carmino, opening her portfolio, and coming as she did so towards Mrs. Varcoe. The next moment all three of them were leaning over the table and talking at once. Mrs. Varcoe pleaded:

"You couldn't do such a thing, my dear Mrs. Carmino. Why, I can't undertake it. There'll be two hundred people. You couldn't possibly do such a thing."

The Secretary only reiterated in clipped phrases:

"I'll have nothing to do with the Food Com-

mittee. I don't approve of their action. It is quite out of order."

Miss Liddicoat began to appeal to her public spirit, breaking off to seize Eugenia, who was hovering round. Venting all her feelings in a violent grip of the eavesdropper's arm she said roughly:

"You're doing no good here. Go to the other end and get busy with the stage." She returned to the charge. "For the sake of the Institute, Mrs. Carmino. Because we differ on one point and the voting is against you, you can't chuck the whole thing. The Institute needs you."

But the Secretary was adamant, till Mrs. Varcoe touched her on the arm and said, in a tone of utter helplessness: "You can't leave me alone. You couldn't do such a thing," when she suddenly gave in without relaxing her expression, shrugged her shoulders, picked up her portfolio, and, with a resigned "Very well," preceded Mrs. Varcoe into the Committee room. There she at once solved the financial question by cutting off the meat pies.

Miss Liddicoat went home rather thoughtful; queer that appealing to all that is biggest in a woman should fail where a little touch on the arm succeeds.

Thus ended the first battle of Pollyjoke Institute; with wonderfully little net result considering the expenditure of vital energy by all concerned. Mrs. Carmino had a sleepless night and Mrs. Varcoe had

several. Eugenia had been put in her place more than once, only to emerge from it at the next opportunity. Miss Bertha's reputation as village spokeswoman was more secure than ever and the President had learnt a thing or two.

III

Waxworks

The great day had dawned and to the ordinary eye no trace of the recent storm was visible. Only the Silent Listener watched every one with interest, as they spoke in slightly lowered tones and moved in a more studied manner than usual. Was it a law of nature, she wondered, that calm succeeded storm as storm succeeded calm, or was it merely contrast that accentuated the stillness? At any rate to her sensitive perceptions people seemed to be moving in a dim light, and each personality was pitched in a lower key, as if some of the force and vividness had been drawn from it.

The only trace of the storm was the manner with which each member approached Mrs. Carmino when necessity arose. There was a hint of reluctance in it that was like the attitude with which one faces what is mysterious and unexplored. It was unfortunate that the Carmino household gods should be so much in request. Their motor lamps were needed for footlights, their dining-room screen for

the stage, their family umbrella for Mrs. Gamp, and Mr. Jeremiah's pipe for the witches. But human beings, like water, have a sure instinct for the line of least resistance, and the consequence was that Nellie Dingle was deputed to be messenger every time.

Mrs. Varcoe, restored to serenity after a good night's sleep, had compromised between patriotism and modesty by allowing Mrs. Kneebone to drape half her naked arm. Miss Liddicoat had hovered round examining a gold penny and Britannia in turn and had expressed complete satisfaction. Sophie Dingle had learnt her cues, collected her glad rags, and having relapsed into her native dialect was making a most promising Mrs. Jarley.

The Committee was having a last rehearsal two hours before the show. The President was in the dressing-room watching Miss Bertha's struggles with the four nurses for the Red Cross tableau. They had all borrowed their uniforms and not one of them knew how to put them on.

Suddenly a man appeared in their midst ; a man pale and trembling with a suggestion of anger in his eyes, but an utterly dejected attitude, as if the attempt to emit sparks had been almost too much for him. He thrust an open letter into the President's hand.

"Miss Liddicoat, what do you think of this? Please read it."

She read :

THE VICARAGE,
POLLYJOKE.

31. 12. 19—

DEAR MR. VARCOE,

I am very much surprised to hear that the church cups and saucers have been removed from the Parish Room for to-night's Social without my knowledge and without my consent. I have long ago come to the conclusion that courtesy to the vicar is not the rule in this Parish. As I am not a fighting parson I shall ask for an exchange.

Yours faithfully,

MARMADUKE O'SULLIVAN.

"Did you ever hear of such a thing in your life, Miss Liddicoat?" said Mr. Varcoe, trying hard to emit another spark but only trembling like an aspen leaf as he spoke. "Why, we sent up a message and asked for the key. And Mr. Jeremiah and I have had those cups and saucers out scores of times during the last two years when Mr. O'Sullivan was away serving, and never thought anything about it. And I'm sure Mr. O'Sullivan never troubled much about the parish when he was away or the church crockery, either."

"He's a peppery little Irishman," said Miss Liddicoat with an air of finality.

But Mr. Varcoe could only repeat in tones of deep emotion:

"Did you ever *read* such a letter?" accenting

the word "read," as if the mere perusal were a crime.

"I shouldn't think twice about it, Mr. Varcoe. He's not worth taking any notice of," she said, as she began to wonder if these letters were contagious in Pollyjoke.

"I shall go"—and there was something like a sob in Mr. Varcoe's throat as he spoke—"and consult with Mr. Jeremiah."

Half an hour later Mrs. Carmino took Miss Liddicoat along the Terrace for high tea before the Social. They were not altogether at ease with each other, and the prospect of a new row to eclipse the old one was a distinct relief. Entering the sitting-room they found Mr. Varcoe sitting, pen in hand, with an air of resolution borrowed from Mr. Jeremiah, who stood beside him. The two churchwardens had concocted a reply, and their letter was the soul of courtesy. Mr. Jeremiah was slow of speech and set in his ways; he had two principles:

1. Moderation in all things.
2. Avoid unpleasantness with neighbours.

He bent over Mr. Varcoe and said:

"That will do."

Mr. Varcoe laid down the pen with an exhausted air, and leaning back he wiped his brow.

The two ladies came up to examine the letter, and Mrs. Carmino, as churchwarden's wife, dictated a long postscript, which would have been longer had

not Mr. Jeremiah remarked: "The less said the better." Miss Liddicoat echoed his sentiment and the letter was sealed. Discussion of the fiery little Irishman lasted all through high tea. It was increasingly vituperative as discussions are apt to be when all agree; a crescendo of abuse affording the only scope for individual effort. Mr. Jeremiah had the last word. His principles forbade him to write an insulting letter, but Mr. O'Sullivan was a "d—d little bounder."

It was fifteen minutes to seven when the President and Secretary entered the Council School and found the wax-works chatting in the passages and side rooms, in every stage of undress. Mrs. Jarley was pinning a rose-sprigged sofa covering round her person; Mrs. Gamp was applying red ink to her nose and Topsy was blacking her face with a cork. Britannia was missing. The President ran wildly up and down searching behind the stage and in every dark corner. Britannia was the first tableau and her draperies were no mean task. She was in despair until she caught the flash of a helmet at the end of the dressing-room, and hurrying up to it espied a massive form, back to the wall, shrinking coily into the coats hanging on hooks.

Poor Britannia! Her dresser had deserted her to attach the New Year's wings, and her beflagged skirt would not meet behind. In fact she never should have been draped standing. The only hope

was to seat her on the music stool in the centre of the stage, and cast flags about the front and sides of her person. This was soon done, and for the rest of the play, between her first appearance and the final group, she moved about happily in a large fur coat. From that moment the wax-works pulled together, but the audience did not.

It is true that the tableau of Mrs. Gamp and Betsy Prig inspired a faint titter, and when Mrs. Gamp was wound up to raise the bottle to her lips the titter was repeated. Towards the end, applause became just audible, but there was not a single encore, and the screen-shifters, Mr. Varcoe and Master Dingle, who had orders to spin out the show by repeating the popular figures, were very much puzzled as to which the popular figures were. When the final tableau broke up, the Jarley Committee sank into the obscurity of the past and breathed again. The massing and grouping of fifteen solid figures on a stage consisting of seven boards placed crosswise on school forms, was a feat that could only have been accomplished by the determination of Miss Bertha and the artistic sense of Mrs. Kneebone. The Refreshment Committee then came to the fore. Every dog has his day.

In the dressing-room there was much cross-questioning, much swallowing and returning of compliments.

"Britannia, you were most dignified."

"Mrs. Gamp, I congratulate you. You never moved a muscle. And that bottle!"

"Miss Muffet, your scream could have been heard a mile off."

"And your orange peel teeth looked lovely."

"How do you think it went?"

"The dresses were a huge success."

"Mrs. Jarley played up well."

"The audience didn't laugh much. I expected more applause."

"Do you really think it went down all right?"

"I believe they were bored stiff," said the President ruefully.

"I can't understand it."

Miss Bertha gave judgment and her judgment was final.

"No, it went very well indeed. Give them time. They have never seen Mrs. Jarley before. It has been a tremendous success."

Miss Bertha knew Pollyjoke audiences. They do not wear their hearts on their sleeves.

The food circulated, pence rattled on the trays, empty tea-cups were refilled, buns and splits disappeared and the guests chewed the cud of reflection slowly. Little by little appreciative remarks came round to the Jarley Committee members, and gradually it became apparent that wax-works would be a *sine qua non* at the next entertainment.

Appreciation could soar no higher. Mrs. Jarley and her figures had indeed "gone down" wholesale at a gulp, a long, slow gulp.

IV

The Social

Had a messenger from Mars or any unaccustomed guest arrived on earth to visit the Pollyjoke social, he would have been frankly puzzled by the third and last phase of that evening. At one moment he might have thought himself on the roof-tops in the centre of a cat chorus, and then again he would have wondered if he had strayed into a company of revellers slightly off their balance. Such was the apparent chaos of sound and movement. The facts, however, were these.

At the platform end some desultory dancing had begun among the girls and women and the Committee members were urging them on. At the far end of the room where the light was dim, all the young men had collected. They had lusty voices but could not dance, so they began to sing. The Committee members had brought music but no songs. The young men sang choruses, joyous and doubtful choruses, but they had brought no music. Each young man sang a different chorus. One or two leading spirits hurried round this mob without

a leader, begging them to name some song that everybody knew. At first there was no response. Then came seven different suggestions, and while the President went to the piano to ask for "Clementine" the mixed choruses broke out louder than ever, so that when Miss Tredinnick sat down to "Oh, my darling," her chords evoked no response.

Miss Tredinnick is the owner of the public-house at the corner of the Terrace. She is *the* accompanist in Pollyjoke, and a very fine lady she looked that evening as she sat at the piano in her shiny black dress, her necklace of pearls as big as wrens' eggs, and a nonchalant expression on her face as if to say: "I know I am well dressed and you see I am indispensable." Her playing was brilliant rather than soothing; she had the same crisp touch for everything, from a funeral march to a polka, the whole wrist being brought into play for every note or two.

Suddenly one of the witches suggested "There was a jolly miller," so the agitated leaders, who had no idea how the game was played, began collecting stray people and pushing them into couples, which broke up again as fast as they were formed. The witch shouted directions so loudly that no one grasped her meaning, and the one other lady who knew the game was elderly, and could not make herself heard; but after much pushing and shoving, a huge oblong-shaped ring was formed, following

the line of the room. This mass of laughing, shouting, gesticulating people began to move ; not circle-wise but to and fro, and round and round at the same time ; like nuggets in a sieve. As they moved they all sang at the top of their voice :

“ There was a jolly miller who lived by himself,
By grinding corn he gained his wealth ;
One hand in the upper and the other in the bag,
And when he moved on they all said ‘ Grab ’ ! ”

At the word “ grab ” the couples separated, each lady moving on to capture a new partner, while the lonely man in the middle seized his chance. But there was no chance here, for in the confusion the middle man had been forgotten. However, the whole mob sang and grabbed with vigour for some ten minutes, and the omission was never noticed. This babel was a positive relief to the leading spirits, who, under cover of the general confusion, were able to rush about gasping : “ What shall we have next ? What does everybody want ? ”

Mr. Varcoe, after acting as door-keeper or screen-shifter all the evening, had now joined the *mêlée*. He met the President in mid-career ; putting up his hand to his ear and raising his voice, he said :

“ What shall we start now ? ”

She brought her lips close to his head and shouted :

“ For Heaven’s sake start something that will occupy them all. The men won’t dance. The

girls don't want to sing. Can't please everybody. I've just been asked for Sir Roger, Musical Bumps, the Valeta, Christmas Carols, General Post, God send you back to me, and Tig-in-the-back. What shall we do ? "

" Nuts and May," replied Mr. Varcoe with an air of profound conviction. " That's the game."

At that moment the discovery was made that there was no middle man for the Miller, and in the comparative lull that followed Mr. Varcoe was able to make himself heard in more confidential tones. He drew Miss Liddicoat aside and said :

" Have you noticed that the vicar is not here ? As an ex-service man he not only had his invitation, but accepted it. What do you think of that ? And the cups and saucers are not even broken."

" Well, well," she replied, not knowing what else to say ; and then more brightly, " Nuts and May did you say ? Yes, do get them going."

No one ever knew for certain if the Miller mob were broken up by force, or if it underwent a natural process of dissolution. At any rate, in a very short space of time, the scene had changed. Mr. Henry Varcoe, now the acknowledged life and soul of the party, was leading one side as he lustily sang " Here we come gathering Nuts and May." The cat choruses had died away and now girls and men were happily mingled in two long lines. Mr. Varcoe was like a man transformed. His eyes were spark-

ling, his knees bent outwards, his arms worked like pump-handles, his very moustache was more erect as the line swayed to and fro. Britannia eyed her husband with pride, but Eugenia said: "Father will have a dreadful attack of asthma in the night. You will see." An approving murmur rose from the ladies round the wall. "Mr. Varcoe is always very good at a Social."

Miss Liddicoat, feeling now assured that he would make the evening "go," went to sit down at the end of the stage. Here the exhausted Sub-Committees were perched like a row of sparrows with drooping feathers. All their animation had gone. The hot air, the excitement of the wax-works, the responsibility of distributing buns and tea and collecting pence, the emotions of the week, had utterly exhausted them, and any shade of cheerfulness that survived was a reflection of stern duty, not of simple enjoyment. Happily the Carmino motor-lamps had been removed from the stage, so that the sparrows sat in semi-twilight. At the far end of their dejected row sat the limpest figure of them all; she alone kept up a wan smile; it was fixed, and she was too tired to take it off.

"How frightfully tired Mrs. Kneebone looks," remarked the Secretary, who was astonished at the fixity of this smile.

"Oh," said the other sparrows in chorus, "Mrs. Kneebone always looks like that at the end of a

Social." And the Silent Listener groaned in spirit as she thought ; " So one's very looks are tabulated in Pollyjoke. Is nothing hidden from one's neighbour ? "

From Nuts and May onwards, Mr. Varcoe kept things going. One noisy game followed another, and the young men and girls were never allowed to drift apart again. Thus the elements were properly mixed, and the object of a Social was accomplished through the energy and promptness of one man.

Only once did a momentary hitch occur, as Mr. Varcoe retired behind the piano to wipe his forehead and gasp for breath. But at this critical moment the lady with the wren's eggs averted disaster. Raising her wrists she struck three sharp chords, and, with the spontaneity of bird-song, the whole company burst out into " Hark the Herald Angels sing." The grand old melody was all the more impressive from being sandwiched between Tig-in-the-back and Blind Peter.

Shortly before midnight Mr. Varcoe's breathing became more and more laboured. Some one murmured " Keel Row " and Miss Liddicoat, whose energy always increased when others flagged, sprang to her feet and caught Eugenia's eye. Eugenia could be relied on, once she had got her second wind, and exercise was good for her. A few other couples stood up and the " Highland Fling " began.

Faster and faster went those supple wrists at the piano ; wilder and wilder grew the motions of the dancers. Eugenia grew pale but Miss Liddicoat's eye was on her. One couple after another flagged, slowed down and staggered back to the benches. Nellie Dingle and Mrs. Knuckey remained in full swing at one end of the room, while the other two leaped to and fro in the centre. You could hardly call it dancing ; thumping of heels, flinging of arms, lurching towards each other, reeling apart again. Eugenia had got her second wind. Mrs. Knuckey was scarlet in the face and the coils of her hair were loosened. Nellie had the advantage with her slender figure.

"Keep going, Mrs. Knuckey," shouted the President, "don't flag."

There was a faint sound of applause. It is good to work by proxy, and the onlookers felt as if they were expending all that energy themselves.

Mrs. Knuckey was moving now like a top that is slowing down, swaying in an uncertain manner, but Miss Liddicoat and Eugenia were going strong. It was clear that the contest would soon be over, when Mrs. Varcoe and Mrs. Dingle advanced to the piano, and each lady seized one of those supple wrists. The music ceased and the dancers stopped automatically, only to turn round and call the interfering parents to account.

"Why, you'd have gone on until you dropped,"

said Mrs. Dingle. "And Nell is none too strong in the heart."

"Never mind," said the President. "To be continued in our next. And another time no mothers allowed in."

There was nothing for it now but "Auld Lang Syne" and "God Save the King." In good old style the first was sung, as Miss Bertha joined hands with Mrs. Carmino, and Mrs. Carmino with Miss Liddicoat, and Miss Liddicoat with Mrs. Varcoe, and Mrs. Varcoe with Mrs. Kneebone, and Mrs. Kneebone with Mrs. Dingle, and so on. The Silent Listener came up and took Miss Bertha's other hand, wondering as they all sang, working their arms up and down, "What is a Social? Is it a pleasure or a duty, or a penance or a privilege?"

And on every face that she scrutinized she read a different answer.

CHAPTER IX

AN OLD LADY

I KNOW an old lady who is neither rich nor brilliant, nor devoted to improving her neighbours. She is not uninterested either in her fellow creatures or in new thought, but all propaganda work leaves her cold. I cannot imagine her ever trying to impress on others any conviction of her own.

I suppose the years have brought changes in her as they bring in all, but she never seems to change very much. She does not appear to be really old, nor has she the bustling activity of middle age at its last gasp. For years she has been, apparently, at a neutral stage of life, neither looking back with regret nor yet perceptibly going down the path which leads to weakness and dependence.

She has few qualities that are noticeable or nameable except an extraordinary restfulness, and that is not so much a quality as an emanation. It is not only in her but all round her in the spot that she has chosen for her home ; so that one looks at her birds and her garden and the salt-water creek

by which her little house is built, and gives them the credit for the peacefulness that always enfolds her.

Everybody loves her. The clever people of the neighbourhood come a long way to see her and find real pleasure in her society. Her talk is refreshing because her thoughts are never second-hand. Even the worldlings who choose their friends for having, not for being, are often at her door.

She has moved about in her day, I believe, known many people and seen many things; but in her quiet back-water, where she sits, day after day, looking out on the sea, she gives no place to regret.

Trees grow down to the water's edge and there are nearly always deep green shadows in the creek. There is no hurrying life or wheeled traffic at her gates, for a footpath is the only approach; but every now and then the ferry-bell tolls on the other side of the water, or big sailing vessels pass under her window coming in from the sea on a rising tide.

Brilliant roses fill her tiny garden and the wild birds come there every day to feed. Her rooms are full of souvenirs of far lands: native weapons, strange shells, foreign curiosities. There is one big bookshelf and a number of borrowed books are lying about. Many of her friends send her the new books written to catch the attention of a novelty-seeking age.

She is interested in all these, but they do not disturb her mellow line of thought ; and one can see, by the titles of her own books, that it is among the old unhurried writers that she keeps up her closest intimacies.

A friend of hers, or perhaps it was a friendly acquaintance, once said : " You know I never can remember if I'm on kissing terms with her or not. There is never any hesitation or surprise if I do kiss her or if I don't. She doesn't come half-way to meet one."

That would seem always to have been her attitude towards life, an attitude of sitting still with gathered forces, for the attainment of acquiescence at best, of resignation at worst. Acquiescence she keeps for her own lot ; but she cannot rise above resignation, an anxious, half-questioning resignation, when she looks on at old age and sickness in her neighbours and at suffering in animals.

Is not such an attitude for the confronting of destiny as good as many another ?

Are we others any happier, we of the fighting instinct, the deliberate purpose, we of the formal creed, the pertinacious, inquiring mind ?

CHAPTER X

THE PENHALIGONS

THEY are like no other family in the world, this hard-headed provincial race.

To begin with, they are rooted to the soil, and seem to have imbibed something of its unchanging nature, being settled there with almost the inevitability of plants and stones. They are very much aware not only that they belong to the locality but that the locality belongs to them. For generation after generation the type repeats itself in a manner hardly possible to any wandering race.

Certain characteristics appear again and again in the men-folk of every branch, outwardly an abruptness of manner informing every casual remark or gesture, inwardly a concentration of power directed exclusively to the attainment of tangible results. Some call this power the business mind, but there is in it something more than that. It is as if the business mind were brought to bear on things remote from its ordinary speculations, on hobbies, on sport, on pleasure.

These men judge a canary with as much solemnity

as if an empire depended on the verdict. Their thoroughness over trifles is engrained. They are long-limbed, spare, clean-shaven, quick of mind, and slow of speech ; they walk heavily and do not care to project their imagination outside their own sphere. They live intensely in their own pursuits, reserving no interest or energy for alien fields. Culture is not excluded from their ken, but it has a peculiar twist. They are not insensitive to beauty and many of them are collectors and connoisseurs in some artistic line. Watch them handle a prize tulip or an exquisite piece of glass ; their judgment is always profound, but in their very touch and appreciation is something of the valuer.

That is always their attitude, they appraise, they do not worship Beauty.

They have definite moral standards resting, perhaps, on a somewhat unmoral foundation.

A young member of the family had played a doubtful trick over the telephone, getting information from one firm at the expense of another.

"My nephew oughtn't to have done it," said Jonathan. "It is a thousand pities. That's the sort of cunning morals those lower-class people have in that town ; but it's a mistake to be too sharp."

And he summed up the incident :

"Those firms will never forget it. It will spoil his prospects. And he can't afford that."

A certain pride of caste struggles yet to bear the daylight of their utilitarian outlook. Jonathan heard one day that a relative was badly off and had taken to "writing for the papers."

"Well," he said slowly, "I don't think any the worse of him for that." And in his tone there was the strangest mixture of condescension and approval.

Sometimes their pride of caste deserves a harder name. More than once Jonathan has described some unsuccessful relative as "obscure," or some new neighbour as "not a person one could associate with."

Several generations ago the head of the family loved and married a beautiful Quaker and became a professed Friend, being thereafter known to the world and posterity as "Quaker Will." One Sunday his two brothers, junior partners in the firm, came post-haste for Will's advice on a deal involving thousands of pounds. He received them coldly.

"Brothers, it is the First Day, and on that day I never talk business. But, if thou wert to come on a Monday morning and ask my advice on this question, I should say to thee 'Sell out at once.'"

The brothers posted back to Plymouth, the sale was effected next day, and the family fortunes were made. The story was suppressed by later generations, but traditions are not transmitted in words alone. Providence, in denying direct descendants to Quaker Will, was careful of the

type. No doubt Herman Melville's whaling Quaker claimed spiritual descent from that careful Friend.

"Don't whale too much a Lord's day, men ; but don't miss a fair chance either ; that's rejecting Heaven's good gifts."

A determined adherence to their own caprice in small matters would have been called, in other men, obstinacy ; but in this family it led to such extraordinary acts that it was supposed to denote "character." Two cousins went driving one day, the host and his visitor.

"Now, Jonathan," said the host, as they got into the dog-cart, "you drive."

"No, Albert, I never drive another man's horse when he's in the trap."

"Well, Jonathan," drawled the other, "I never drive my own horse when another man's in the trap."

So they tied the reins to the dash-board and drove through ten miles of twisting lanes with folded arms.

An intense admiration for everything that is genuine makes them intolerant of big talk.

"So and so," said Jonathan, "was boasting to me about the pace of the Fire Brigade. So I and Albert said to him 'Let's drive down to the *Fortescue Arms*.' And he never boasted again. Full gallop," he added with a broad, slow smile after a second's pause, "down the steepest hill in the country."

They are always summing up individuals by the standard of brain-power. "James lived and died stupied," I heard Albert say once in a final manner.

They think that all can be explained, or that all should be capable of being explained. If a thing does not admit of explanation there is probably something "fishy" about it. They were very much exercised in their minds when a friend married a plain school teacher.

"What is the attraction?" said Jonathan. "She's no beauty; no push; no money. She's no good in society. How could he have done it?"

They see causes as well as effects, thanks to their love of probing things to their depth, and thus often win flashes of insight into big questions.

"Old Job, the groom, was a wonderful judge of horses," some one remarked once.

It was an undisputed fact; but Jonathan pursued the question further, thereby illuminating the characteristics of a whole bygone generation.

"It was his life. He didn't set his mind to many things. There was less rushing about to football in those days, more interest in employers."

Their critical faculty, being acute but usually destructive, accounts for any false conclusions they may attain; for the true critic detects good points even more readily than he detects bad ones. Sometimes their method proves too quick; for instead of encircling a subject they rush at it, seize one or

two salient points and believe they have picked the heart out of it. Very often they have. Now and then, however, they have seized the shades and missed the lights.

Jonathan's cousin, Kimiel, has diverged a little from the type. A sense of beauty seems to have slipped into his nature in some irregular fashion, in defiance of Penhaligon tradition. Sometimes it almost seems as if he appreciates a beautiful thing for its own sake, irrespective of the value attached to the object.

Then he is more versatile than his relations, speaking in comparative fashion, for of course the epithet versatile applied to any Penhaligon is a mere contradiction in terms. At any rate he talks more quickly and laughs more lightly than the others. He does not move through the world with their set features and their heavy boots, and that air of always taking in and never giving out ; his face is full of light and shade and his gestures are eloquent as words. Though nearly middle-aged he is unwrinkled, nor has any single rut absorbed his energies. There is something fluid about him still, superficial his enemies would say, but indeed it is nothing more nor less than a capacity for receiving new impressions, a characteristic of youth prolonged into later years.

He shares with the rest of his family a profound interest in local affairs and knowledge of local

conditions, but these preoccupations do not shut him in from the larger world. He went to New Zealand when he was young and now, every other year, he travels on the Continent ; nor is he unaware of the value of the " cosmopolitan touch " in his dealings with his neighbours.

He has a very fine sense in ordering his surroundings, in complete contrast to the Spartan and comfortless regime of his cousins. His food must be exquisitely cooked, his house decoration simple and perfect.

He is delightful with children and he loves all natural things with a really understanding love, from the wild flower in the hedgerow to the butterflies of France, on which he has written a monograph for private circulation. He treats every shrub and tree in his garden with a personal care, as if it were his own child, apparently entering into the feelings of each plant from the inside, and understanding not only the individual needs but the reason for them. It is as if he had a sixth sense and knew at first hand the sensations of a growing shoot or a germinating seed.

Without a doubt the love of beauty is more strongly developed in him than in any other Penhaligon, but even Kimiel is only responsive to beauty in a tangible form.

Birds, flowers and children of course ; they are things that you can see and handle and understand.

But the stars and poetry and dreams, what man would waste his time over such things? Only the physically unfit or those with a bee in their bonnet.

Such would be Kimiel's thought, if he ever expended any thought on an abstract subject. He was once heard saying :

" I see X—— has discovered a new star. What's the good of that? He would have been far more useful to men if he had discovered an old sow in a back-yard."

Perhaps Kimiel's divergence from the family type is the beginning of a new order. Perhaps this hard-headed race may yet produce an eminent philosopher who will forget his dinner in the rapt contemplation of some occult law; but it is doubtful.

Straightforward, effective, courageous, they may be all that and more, but for many generations some fate has brooded over them, decreeing that they shall live and die deaf to any whisper from the world of dream and fantasy.

CHAPTER XI

SEAL MUSIC

ROUND about our coast, at the foot of crags and promontories, or nestled in a bay, there is many a cavern and fissure untrodden by the steps of man, for without the help of boat or rope he cannot even glimpse these secret places.

One cave there is in particular, known to very few and seldom visited ; it goes by the name of the Cathedral. In such a fastness, washed by the ever-moving tides, screened from the light of day, Nature has many a secret birth and growth. There you may notice variegated roof and walls where human chisel has never imprisoned form in symmetry, and there a translucent, never-resting pavement where not even sunlight and shadow can trace a diapered pattern on the water.

The Cathedral faces out to the open sea and the only approach to it by land, after you have climbed down the precipice, is through a narrow passage some forty yards long, running parallel with the coast and at right angles to the cave itself. When you begin to penetrate this mysterious entrance,

unlike any west-end Cathedral door through which you have ever passed, you can walk upright, but very soon you must stoop and creep, sometimes over the smooth rock, and sometimes through ice-cold water to the knees. Then, when you come out suddenly from that darkness into the vaulted cave, you see the whole outer world of dancing sea and sunlight framed in one gigantic arch. Inside, the walls are smooth and shining, and the water laps up to the far end with a greedy, sucking motion. Above the present tide marks is a deposit of seaweed, drifted there by the ebb and flow of many a summer and many a winter sea. You would not dare to probe its depth, for its very softness holds a threat as if it were enticing you, to engulf you in its shiny brown folds of sea rope or sea ribbon and to hold you imprisoned for evermore.

If you enter the cavern silently, you may chance to see a grey form or two lying on some slab of rock, but the moment your approach is known they will slip into the sea, there will be a splash, a gurgle and a ringed pattern on the water, and then you will be alone in the Cathedral.

The entrance cannot be reached except at low tide, or a little before and after, but this particular experience is only one of many sea ventures possible for you if you know that coast with the intimacy of a native.

Somewhat farther in from the Atlantic than those

craggs and caves are certain sandy estuaries long associated with weird and gruesome tales. They are tales of death and warning, of unearthly wailing at dead of night as of women in the grip of the fiend himself, of sobbing, crying and moaning, all portentous with prophecy and harbingers of sorrow to those who hear them. Even the fishermen are not proof against these superstitions or beliefs, though they, of all men, might have made known the truth which was left for the twentieth-century sceptics to declare.

“Seeing is believing,” say these enlightened ones, and “Sound carries proof of identity.” What ghostly wail at midnight, among those mysterious shifting sands, where the tide rushes in with the velocity of panic, could impress on them a sense of fear and shrinking, a belief in ghosts, a message from the unseen world?

Yet, after all, may not reality hold more terror than shadow? May it not be that no wail of spirit, no fiendish clamour bred of men’s imagination could equal in pathos and terror the sound of the seal crying at night, crying out its very soul in those lonely spaces where sand and water wage unrelenting conflict?

Have you heard that music? If you have not, pray go out and listen on a dark autumn evening when there is no moonlight and, as you go, take one of the enlightened ones with you by the hand, not

for your own support or comfort, but just for his further enlightenment.

The first time I ever heard that seal music was in their more northern haunts when we were rowing round the Isle of caverns one day in June.

In that region, nature, even on days of sunshine, wears no friendly aspect. Wind and tide and current make a fearsome girdle round the island. Between this Isle of caverns and the mainland the sound is hardly a mile in width. Here on the calmest summer day you may watch the tide racing up or down the middle of the channel with all the clamour of a mill-stream. You may note the foaming mane of the Horse, that evil submarine rock ; for all its gleaming whiteness there is something very sinister about that crested break in the blue expanse of water. You may row into the caverns or you may listen to the boom of the sea below, as you stand on the island cliffs, but you never lose the feeling that the King of Darkness holds his power uncontested here. You feel that he has undermined the land with impenetrable caves and sown the bottom of the sea with rocks and reefs and pinnacles, that he has thrown the shades of mystery and danger over and under God's briny Paradise.

One cave runs in two hundred yards ; you can explore it in a boat till you leave the daylight sixty yards behind you ; after that you have to swim. The roof is all different levels and colours and there

is a twilight world of wash and echo in there, a weird beauty without sunshine or solid earth, or the canopy of heaven, only the deep green water heaving and sucking underneath you with an energy that leads nowhither, only forth and back, yet never rests from motion. On the west side of the island we were just going to row into a fissure full of seabirds and their nests when a most unearthly wailing came from a nearer cave. For one moment it literally stopped the beating of our hearts.

It was not only like the wail of a soul in torment, it had a note of helpless, questioning terror, a kind of beseeching, tremulous sob, half fear and half entreaty, in the face of some unrelenting mystery. It sounded like a voice saying, "Open and tell us; open and tell us": but behind and under those simple words was a sound like the rush of many waters, and of children crying in the dark, of wind confined in caverns and of ghosts in prison wailing for the sunlight. It began again and rose to a louder, more urgent note, almost a bark, then it died down again to a liquid sigh.

"A seal," said our boatman, resting on his oars.

We begged him to turn and take us in. The cave was narrow and we backed in slowly. The water was clearest green, the whole cave was full of green light or green darkness, and coolness and mystery. We were hardly in when that unearthly sound began again, only this time it was not one lost soul, there

must have been strophe and anti-strophe and chorus. And each time, as that liquid sob rose to its highest pitch, it seemed as if the imprisoned sorrow were washing like driven tides against the cavern roof. We could detect too a note of mockery amid the wailing, as if the lost souls were not even united in their inconsolable grief, as if one would jeer at another with long-drawn breath and sigh, and then the other would give way utterly in a howl that would have cleft a fissure in granite, so penetrating was the pathos of the sound.

The cave was not a long one, but where it seemed to end there was a passage to the right, from whence, as from a funnel of darkness, these heart-rending sounds had reached the outer air. There was no room to turn a boat, but we could half turn and back in. The funnel was short and in the act of turning we saw a ghostly vision.

We had left the sunlight and the blue sea outside, left the gleaming green of the water in the main cavern, and with eyes only half accustomed to that dim light we tried to pierce to the end of the funnel. The water was breaking in there on a tiny beach of pebbles. We could not see the pebbles, but we could hear each wave suck backwards, and over the stones the darkness was not so deep. Peering into the cave towards us were three faces, three grey faces, transparent and shadowy in that uncertain light but almost human in their anxious expression.

They looked like the faces of old, old men crouching there, overburdened with the knowledge of long ages, peering into the future with apprehensive air ; but the faces had grey whiskers about their childish features and behind them we could half divine three shining bodies. There was a flip-flap and a sudden grinding of stones, as if a seventh wave were receding down the tiny cavern beach, but it was a very long wave for the whole beach seemed to be moving, and it continued moving.

“ They’re coming,” said the boatman.

I believe that as he spoke he backed slowly, but his movements held little interest for us. We saw half a dozen seals plunge into the water with a single rush, then six more and after that others again, but by that time our attention was turned to the water itself and we had none to spare for those queer, slippery forms coming down the beach. There was a splashing on every side, a heaving and pitching of our boat, a gurgling and foaming of the water. The whole cavern seemed to be rocking and the water was churned into spray as the seals plunged under and round the boat and then went swimming out to the open sea.

So small was the space and so sudden the onrush, that we half expected to find a seal or two in our arms, and we certainly expected them to capsize the boat, for the advance of twenty panic-stricken, flapping forms in that narrow space where they

could not separate to pass us made us realize how frail a thing was our little craft.

"I've never seen such a sight in all my forty-nine years here," said the boatman, "not so many together as that. There must have been twenty."

The music was stilled for that day and we saw no more of our shadowy friends, except that every now and then on our homeward way a great, grey head would rise slowly from the water, with an expression like that of a St. Bernard dog, would gaze at us with protuberant eyes, and then, throwing itself a little backwards and exposing a speckled throat, would sink down, down into its watery home where we could follow it no more.

The last time I heard the seal music I was returning on an autumn evening from an expedition among the sandhills. My only companion was one of the enlightened ones, a foreigner in these parts. The tide was rising fast when we came to the estuary and the light was failing, but with walking-sticks we felt our way to the plank that spanned the channel. Ten minutes later the plank would have been under water and we should have had to make a long *détour* to effect our crossing. We wandered awhile on the homeward side, to listen to the water lapping up the sand flats with relentless flow. Suddenly a long moaning wail came out of the darkness and the flood. We stood still, as if turned into pillars, half anticipating that the oncoming tide and darkness

would resign their kingdoms at that unearthly summons ; but no light broke up the shadows, and still the sea came on at our feet.

“ By the nine gods,” said my companion, for half his enlightenment consisted in classic allusion, “ is that Cerberus or a lost spirit ? ”

The cry came again ; a cry from the very soul of wind and water and waste flat spaces, yet instinct with human tears and yearning and something more than human terror.

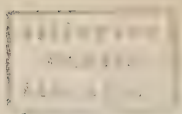
He lit a cigarette. In that still night air the flame would have burnt steadily, but his hand was trembling like a poplar-leaf.

“ No wonder they say the place is haunted,” he muttered.

We turned away up the hill. All the way home we discussed the pros and cons of Elizabeth Ann, and whether she would have remembered to kindle the log fire and to put on the coffee for supper.

And I wondered.

All through the night was that seal wailing in the darkness and the water ? All through the ages have the seals been crying with the voice of a child without hope, or of a god who has lost his immortality ? Who has ever tried to learn their language ? Who will ever penetrate their mystery ?



CHAPTER XII

THE BIRTHDAY

THE postman was late that morning, or so it seemed to Miss Priscilla who watched for him from her upper window.

She was dressed early and had put on her pale grey shawl and pinned a pink bow on her front, for it was her eightieth birthday and "company" would be dropping in. She lay as usual on the couch drawn close to the window of her bed-sitting-room; without raising her head she could watch the clouds and the movements of the tide over the mud-flats, and the flight of water-birds, white or silver against the dark soil of the creek; her "picture show," she called it.

The black-headed gulls, white with their winter plumage now, would wheel and scream in flocks or settle on a sandy spit that ran out into the middle of the creek defying the highest tides.

And if you looked closely you might see there a line of ghostly brown forms, still, huddled, attentive, a parliament of curlews waiting for the time to feed, ready to take wing if any human form came near. Miss Priscilla always blessed intruders, for she loved

to see them rise in a cloud and to watch for their white rump feathers and their curved beaks against the sky. Sometimes a flock of sanderlings would sweep by like driven snow-flakes against the mud, and then turning suddenly would be lost to sight, mere grey specks against a neutral background. And at low tide the redshanks would step daintily, picking out food with their long beaks, each one mirrored in the shining mud so that, what with the birds and their shadows, all the wet ground seemed full of movement. On days when the wind was in the west you could plainly hear their piping note far away up the creek and the piercing wail of the curlews.

Day after day as Miss Priscilla sat there, she would speak her thoughts to the clouds and the water and the birds, and they always seemed to answer her in just the way that she required, giving her a sense of peace and assurance rather than any articulate reply to her comments. For fifteen years she had never seen them or spoken to them except from that upper window, but all the same they grew closer to her every day, and through all that growing familiarity with their outer aspect she never lost the sense of wonder, for in her loving eyes her daily companions were full of charm and mystery.

The gate clicked at last and the postman's lunging step crunched on the gravel. Then Miss Elizabeth entered with a little pile of letters and parcels.

"Priscilla," she said, looking firmly at her sister, "why, you're all of a tremble this morning. Well, I suppose a birthday is a birthday, come when it may."

And she turned to poke the fire in rather a severe fashion. All Miss Elizabeth's little actions were executed with a certain severity and her square chin and spectacles lent force to the delusion that she was a strong character. It is true that she never changed her opinions or her tactics ; it is true that the world believed she ruled her sister with a rod of iron ; but really, Miss Priscilla, yielding and gentle as she was, held undisputed sway in the little household, though no one except Martha Mary was aware of that fact.

Martha Mary had been with the Miss Trethewys for forty years and more ; that is to say, she had scrubbed, cooked, dusted and washed for them, answered them back when she was in a temper, grumbled at their ways and wishes, and kept all their little secrets from a curious world with an integrity worthy of some weightier matter. Nor did she ever take a holiday. Not that Miss Priscilla and Miss Elizabeth were slave drivers ; far from it. They had been "father and mother both" to Martha Mary as she always proclaimed, in moments of emotion. The truth was that she had been born and reared in the House, and other than the inmates of that gaunt grey building she claimed no kith or

kin. Even now she would fling down her dishes and run, if a workhouse funeral passed the gates, and follow with a tear in her eye to the burying of one of her own people.

While Miss Elizabeth was busy with the fire, Miss Priscilla glanced hurriedly at the writing on the envelopes and tore open a pale pink missive with trembling fingers. Giving an anxious glance at her sister's back, she said, trying hard to speak in casual or even astonished tones :

"Mrs. Peddar is going to drop in for a cup of tea to-day. How very nice of her !"

"Priscilla," said Miss Elizabeth, turning on her severely, "what do you mean? You know Miss Berryman has been coming to tea on your birthday these twenty years."

"Yes, of course," said the other guiltily. "Never mind." And then, with an assumption of playfulness: "Well, the birthday cake is big enough for four."

"Priscilla, you must know as well as I do that Mrs. Peddar and Miss Berryman don't speak."

"Let me see. Oh yes, I remember there was some little trouble about the Club," said the other hurriedly as if she had something to conceal.

"Some little trouble!" echoed Miss Elizabeth. "You know as well as I do, you've heard it a score of times, that when Mrs. Peddar came here to live with her newfangled notions and started a mixed

Club without so much as 'with your leave' or 'by your leave' Miss Berryman got on the high horse. And I don't blame her. She's been running the Girls' Guild these thirty years and who was Mrs. Peddar to set herself up like that? And she a foreigner too. And then she took offence because Miss Berryman never asked her to the Guild Social, and Miss Berryman she said she wouldn't touch those mixed Clubs with a barge-pole, and Mrs. Behenna repeated it round again and of course they never speak now. And as to passing the time of day, why, if they meet in the street one of them has to go over and walk in the gutter. And 'tis a well-known thing that Mrs. Peddar goes for her butcher's meat at eleven o'clock and Miss Berryman goes at half-past ten. Mark my words, Priscilla, if you have those two in the house together, you're asking for trouble. And on your birthday and all; well, I never did!"

The elder sister listened patiently, as if she were hearing for the first time the epic history of the feud that had raged for eleven months, rending the village into two violent factions, pervading public effort and social function alike, the feud that was gradually uprooting from every hearth all feelings of peace and goodwill toward neighbours.

"Well, it's done now," she said when her sister drew breath. And she made rather a self-conscious attempt to look regretful. "What's done can't be

undone. And I dare say they won't tear me in pieces."

"I shall not be there to see it," said Miss Elizabeth with more firmness than logic. "I must walk up to Knave-go-by and get in those subscriptions after lunch. I shall be in late for tea ; a slice of birthday cake and a pot of fresh tea when I come in will do for me."

And she left the room, shutting the door with some severity.

Miss Priscilla, left alone with her thoughts and her letters, looked out at the white gulls clustered on the sand-bank, and clasping her hands tightly together she murmured :

"If only I can do it. If only I can make them think it's an accidental meeting. It wouldn't be really telling a lie, and they couldn't quarrel on my birthday."

The tide was out now, and the creek was golden-brown as the sun shone on the mud and the salt weeds that grew there. Later on, at tea-time, the valley would be a silver tongue pushing in among the dark woods, and she was glad of that for her visitors' sake, because when people saw the creek filled with water they always said : "How beautiful, how peaceful." But she herself loved it better at low tide, for the golden flats took her thoughts away into wild space and open country, and there was a glow and richness in their colour that seemed to

come flooding in at her window, while the silver valley was always more chaste and withdrawn.

Many people had envied her that view from the upper window and some had noticed the birds and others had not, but nobody, she was quite sure of that, looked out on the tidal creek day after day with just the same feeling of ownership. The habit of living with them had made her feel that they were her birds and her changing tides. No lord of feudal manor ever enjoyed possessive rights more fully.

She shook herself out of her reverie and began to undo her letters and packets, and to spread the contents all round her. They were a strange assortment of presents for an old lady of eighty you would have said if you had not known Miss Priscilla. Little toys and knick-knacks made to catch the attention of a child, homely gifts with something of novelty or jest about them: a new dwarf spinning top, a rag doll that was penwiper one side and pincushion the other, a tiny quicksilver puzzle and the latest thing in match-boxes. She laid them all out on the table at her side, placing them by the two gifts that had come up with her breakfast tray; a new framed photograph of her dear Prince of Wales from Miss Elizabeth, and from Martha Mary the deepest token of affection that she had ever received. This was a miniature white basket with model eggs, the whole thing woven of the pith of rushes. It was

a lost art in the village and Martha Mary's specimens were immensely prized.

As Miss Priscilla looked at all these treasures she gave a sigh and this passed through her mind: "Why, the Queen herself cannot be richer in good friends than I am." But the thought only made her a little sad and very humble, not uplifted in any way, and she began to read her letters with a trembling lip.

And indeed Miss Priscilla had a friend in nearly every house in the village, while no one ever heard of her having an enemy. Her sedentary life was never dull because one neighbour after another would be always running in to cheer her, or rather to cheer themselves, for no one thought of paying her the usual invalid visit, although she had been confined to that upper room for so many years. The light of cheerfulness was always burning on her hearth and so close was her touch with the world outside that she was always able to give her visitors more news than they brought in to her.

They also carried away far more than they could ever bring in the way of smiles and friendly feelings. Nobody knew whence she drew her fund of anecdotes and sunny happiness, but every one believed that the supply was inexhaustible.

At two o'clock Miss Elizabeth set out with her bag and her book, having poked the fire and taken

her sister's letters for the post. Miss Priscilla sat with her presents all round her, unable to fix her mind on anything but the garden gate, and when at last Mrs. Peddar appeared below she was arranging her pink bow for the thirteenth time.

Mrs. Peddar always enjoyed the peace of that room ; it did her good, she declared, like walking through a wood, or stepping into an empty church ; the old lady's talk and presence had just that kind of effect on her. But that afternoon she found her hostess rather absent-minded and even when she presented her little gift, a pocket mirror bound in blue leather, Miss Priscilla was casting one eye on the birthday present and one on the garden gate. Presently she exclaimed, throwing up her hands :

" There's my old friend, Miss Berryman, coming in. Why, it really is. Coming to tea on my birthday ; she's the best neighbour that ever was ! "

" Oh, dear," said Mrs. Peddar, rising, " I think I'd better go and leave you to your friend."

" Oh, please, please don't go," said the old lady. " I should be so disappointed if you didn't stay, dear Mrs. Peddar. You won't mind Miss Berryman, will you ? I should be miserable if you didn't have a cup of tea with me and share my birthday cake."

Her tones were tremulous like those of a pleading child. Mrs. Peddar had no choice before her. It was impossible to talk of slights and quarrels and " feelings " in that room. Directly she came to live

in the village she had joined the mute conspiracy of those who kept all things of a sad or unpleasant nature from Miss Priscilla's ears.

She sat down again just as Martha Mary appeared at the door with Miss Berryman, pushing that lady in rather than announcing her.

Her birthday greetings over, Miss Berryman turned round, and the two ladies glared at each other, while for one dreadful moment Miss Priscilla felt as if her tongue were going to stick to the roof of her mouth. No, she could not face the situation ; she made a cowardly compromise and said feebly, while she undid a little packet that her old friend had just pressed into her hands :

"Look what Mrs. Peddar has brought the vain old lady." And she pointed to the little mirror.

Miss Berryman's jaw dropped, but it was too late ; out of her little packet fell the twin mirror to the other, only this one was bound in green leather.

Miss Priscilla clapped her hands.

"Well," she said, "I stand ashamed. It seems my vanity cannot be hidden and you all know my little weaknesses. Now I shall be happy. I have one for Sunday and one for weekdays."

There was a general laugh, and under cover of the merriment Martha Mary brought in the tea. The critical moment had passed, and both ladies were safely in their seats. Miss Berryman poured out tea as usual and Mrs. Peddar was asked to cut

the birthday cake. With the moral support of these little occupations for her guests, Miss Priscilla kept up the conversation, but when each lady had relapsed into her chair, and had begun to sip her tea and to crumble her cake, the situation became more difficult.

It was like a bad dream she thought afterwards, though at the time she was far too flustered to think at all. It was as if two hungry vultures were waiting, one on each side of her, to peck her up in a single mouthful before they fell upon each other ; while she, trembling, counting her last seconds, could only delay the fatal moment by throwing crumbs of conversation, ridiculous inadequate crumbs, first to one then to the other, strictly in turn.

What she talked about she never knew : birds, cake, mirrors, clouds, subscriptions, birthdays, anything and everything, without sense or sequence ; but still each vulture kept her ground.

Suddenly a real thought struck her, glancing into her memory through all those fantastic phrases that she was spinning out from Heaven knew whence.

" Oh, Miss Berryman, I am wool gathering ! It's your entertainment to-morrow at the Guild, and I've never sent for that prize for the Beauty Competition. I promised you a pocket mirror, didn't I ? Weeks ago it was. Oh, dear, what shall I do ? And I know Elizabeth can't go into Tolvern to-morrow ! "

She glanced ruefully at the two new mirrors by

her side and something in the vultures' features made her feel that the dreaded moment had come.

"Oh, no," she reassured them quickly, "I wouldn't part with either of my birthday presents for the world. Not for the world. If only I weren't such an old cripple I could go shopping myself."

There was a pause before Mrs. Peddar said rather stiffly:

"I am going into Tolvern to-morrow, Miss Priscilla, and I'd gladly do any little commission for you, but I shan't be home till the last bus."

Her face became childlike and happy once more.

"Could you really? Oh, I should be glad." And she reached for her purse which lay on the window-sill. "But I can't trouble you to come here at seven o'clock at night. Perhaps—perhaps——" She hesitated.

"The last bus stops at the corner by the Institute and the entertainment will be going on then," said Miss Berryman, looking at no one in particular and speaking apparently into the air.

It was not exactly an olive-branch, but Mrs. Peddar glanced at Miss Priscilla's face and saw that the wrinkles were deepening once more.

"Would you like me to drop it at the Institute?" she asked the old lady. "I can easily get out at the corner and then it will be in time."

The olive-branch was held out unmistakably now "Won't you bring it right in, Mrs. Peddar?"

It was the first time either lady had addressed the other in the past eleven months.

"Well, I should like to see a Beauty Competition. I've no idea how you run them."

The admission of ignorance was like oil on troubled waters.

"Now, I do declare," said Miss Berryman, "you're just the person. You shall come and count the votes. We want some one—er—disinterested."

"Certainly," said Mrs. Peddar. "I am always glad to pick up a new idea. There is nothing like moving with the times, and it is quite a novelty to me. We never have Beauty Competitions up in the North."

Miss Berryman's friendliness was now unsealed. Fitfully conscious of her own conservatism, fearful of being left behind in the rush of new ideas, she had plodded on faithfully in the only rut that custom had made easy for her, and now her Beauty Competitions, her oldest, most well-worn form of entertainment were described by her rival as novelties, and she herself was credited with moving with the times. It was balm to her doubts and fears. There must be something in Mrs. Peddar after all. She smiled approval on the lady.

"As Miss Priscilla can't be there, perhaps you would present the prize at the end of the evening?"

"I shall be delighted," said the other, turning to the old lady, "to do anything to help my friend."

"And I," replied Miss Berryman, "shall be delighted to welcome you to our entertainment as my friend's representative."

Miss Priscilla felt an unholy desire to stand up suddenly and crow like a cock, but both her visitors rising simultaneously to leave, she diverted her attention to thanking them for their company and to saying good-bye. She watched them go out of the gate and along the street, and craning her neck towards the window-pane she saw them disappear round the corner.

For the first time since the feud began, both ladies were walking in the middle of the road. The gutter might never have been there.

A few minutes later Miss Elizabeth came in quite out of breath.

"Priscilla, what ever have you gone and done? I met Miss Berryman and Mrs. Peddar as I came along, walking in the middle of the road, as friendly as if they had been sisters. Miss Berryman was talking and Mrs. Peddar was listening."

Miss Priscilla earnestly disclaimed all knowledge of how it happened while her sister sat drinking her tea and pondering over the new phenomena. She had trained herself through long years not to take an unduly optimistic view of things, and her temperament had made her training easy. She was never one who jumped to hopeful conclusions, or allowed herself to be carried away by speed or

glamour. This reconciliation, if reconciliation it were, must be examined from every point of view. Finally she gave her opinion.

"I suppose the Guild and the Club will be joining up after this. Well," and she sniffed censoriously as she raised her head, "we shan't have anything to talk about now. I can't think whatever we shall do. The place will go to sleep."

Late that evening, after Miss Elizabeth had kissed her good night, Miss Priscilla softly pulled back a corner of the blind and pressed her face against the dark window-pane. The tide was falling again and she could hear the curlews wailing on the mud-flats.

"Good night, my birds," she whispered. "I've had a happy birthday."

And then she rang her hand-bell for Martha Mary to come and put her to bed.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GIANTS' CARN

SO often you have gazed at them, the great grey boulders flung carelessly by giant hands all over those lonely hills, the gaunt cliff castles rising sheer from the Atlantic breakers. You know their characteristics, and when you close your eyes you can see the contour and angles of each one. But you are not one of them. They hold their grim secret, looking down on you as from an impenetrable fortress.

Do you know how to approach them? I will tell you.

You sit among them in the rain, hour after hour, emptying your head and heart of all claims, and slowly a sense of oneness grows between you. Do they become human, endowed with a soul like yourself? Or do you become a silent, deeply-rooted boulder of granite?

That does not matter. It is all the same. All individual consciousness has ebbed away from you as you sit there, quite still; the green water of the little cove far below you; the line of breaking foam

round that dark coast now standing in misty outline ; the ceaseless roar and wash of the waves ; the layers of thrift and sea-campion clothing every interstice between the boulders ; the grey lichen with spots of vivid orange covering the rough surface of the rocks ; the russet bracken growing in ledges on the grass ; you do not observe all these, you feel them. You are conscious of them, unconsciously, as you are of your own limbs.

No longer have you separate senses by which impressions enter ; sight, hearing, touch, all are merged in one transcending sense of utter simplicity. You are actually one with the bracken, the granite and the soil, one with the vegetation and the sea. You are them and they are you. And, whenever you suffer the inevitable reaction from times of deeper insight, there will remain with you some dim memory of those moments in the rain, moments of mysterious yet utterly direct union with the wild country round you.

Of all the wild hills in this rugged country the old Carn stands out most prominently now. For the first time within the memory of man the hill is seen as it really is, stripped of the enshrouding gorse and fern ; for a raging fire has levelled all green things, and now only charred soil lies between the boulders that strew the slopes and crown the summit. You hardly know whether that boulder-strewn hill is laughable or sublime. You can only

think of giants at play. Surely a whole army of giants were fighting once, or playing once, over the hill-side, until they scattered on a sudden impulse, dropping their pebbles as they ran.

At sunset, when, winding along the lonely road, you approach the carn from the east, you see its whole double-crested outline against a molten sky, and the angular patches of black soil and grey stone are lost in a rich amethyst hue. In such a light its proportions are majestic if not mountainous, and later, when the moon rises behind it in a steel-blue sky, it assumes a look of dominating grandeur.

How old is that hill? How many centuries has it been standing there, sublimely unmoved by the boom of the ocean hurling itself, not half a mile away, at the roots of the country, sending up a hollow subterranean sound that reaches far inland? Have those boulders been heaved up to the surface in some monstrous conflict of forces, or has the living garment of soil and herbage gradually died away leaving the bare bones of the hill-side exposed? Who knows? Whatever its past, it stands there now, forbidding and proud and sombre among its radiant neighbours.

Radiant autumn it is indeed this year. Never was there such a September. All the hill-sides are blazing with a glory of red and gold.

Purple of the rustling heather, gold of the scented

gorse, mauve of the starry-flowered ling, russet of dying bracken. Mingled with all that brilliancy are clumps of the dead brown heather-bells that rustle as you touch them, rustle with a sound reminiscent of wind and sunshine and fragrance, the music of the wild country.

Here and there the late-blooming heather mingles with the gorse in familiar undergrowth at your feet, forming a rich, mosaic pattern with detailed points of colour. These catch the eye, but only those broad masses of distant colour can satisfy the soul, with a blinding rush of ecstasy ; now and then in some hollow between the hills a vivid pool of gold, where a gorse covert is in full bloom ; now and then a stretch of straw yellow, where the half-starved moorland grass has already taken on its winter garb ; and everywhere, to north and south and west, the blue sea. Sometimes a grey rock, sometimes the golden furze, plumb against the blue.

The colour of the sea is never out of your sight, the sound of it never out of your ears. The very air has a fresh, sea-blown taste. And in your being reigns a sense of power and freedom and joy ; joy that will never be exhausted, joy that you never can express.

CHAPTER XIV

OLD ZACKIE

I

The Sportsman

HE cannot be more than fifty, but they always call him Old Zackie : he has a funny old face and funny old ways. He has been thirty years in Australia now, but still his favourite topic is "the old country" and his reminiscences of Penzance and Mousehole are inexhaustible. Little trace of dialect remains in his speech, but if I use a Cornish word he brightens as if I had brought him a long-lost treasure ; and the other day I heard him, in a passion with the cook, reiterating "I we'ant do ut."

When he first came out, he told me, he lived with a family in Turramurra. He started there on a Monday ; Tuesday came and Wednesday, and still no sign of pasties at the midday meal.

"Which day do 'ee have pasties then ?" he inquired and, undeterred by shouts of mirth all round the table, he began to ask about taty cake. Life must have brought him many surprises in

those thirty years, but he still remembers that incident as if it were yesterday.

He has led a wandering life out here opossum shooting, prospecting, gardening, drifting about from one cattle-station to another, drinking heavily whenever he gets to a town. To see Zackie at his best you should go to the yard when he is milking. The yard is an earth enclosure fenced by high palings of rough wood. I love to see the old man with the scar on his forehead that will never heal, his sagging trousers that always leave a line of shirt below the shabby waistcoat of grey flannel, his face with unkempt moustache and a ragged growth that is something more than imperial and less than beard.

He is very natty and precise over his job. Everything must be done just so, and when he has tapped Grannie, or Darkie, or Dollie on the back with his rough stick, poked her into the milking stall, and enclosed her head by the wooden lever, so that she cannot draw back, he fetches the green-hide thong from its accustomed hook and fastens it on her outside hind leg in the accustomed way. The thong, from the hide of a beast killed last week, is still hairy, but the ring to which it is attached is old and worn. The ring goes inside the leg from behind, and the thong is threaded through, doubled back, and secured to a hole in the fence by Zackie's own particular half hitch.

There is method in this old-maidish precision as he showed me ; for if he has a troublesome cow he need only pull the end of the thong and it comes undone instantly, while one turn of his hand slips the ring free before the cow has time to kick. As soon as the cow's head is secured Zackie opens the little wooden gate, seizes a calf gently by one ear and hauls it out to get a feed before we start milking the mother. While we milk he talks about the dispositions of different cows, wandering off now and then to other subjects.

" You can't exactly say them's human beings," he says, looking fondly at Grannie, " but that's the way you ought to treat them. You must study the nature of them and they'll be all right. Some of them are that cunning they torment you, and gammon they won't go in the bail, but you soon gets to know their ways."

One day in the middle of telling me about teats and how some are much easier to milk than others, and how you must keep on moistening them with your hand, because that is natural, in imitation of the sucking calf, he suddenly began to talk about a sunny bank near Lamorna where he always used to find the earliest white violets in spring.

" Them little sweet ones, you know. A lovely scent it was."

He is a real lover of Nature, not only in sentimental reminiscence, for he appreciates her every-

day moods and draws all his knowledge from observation of her ways. Zackie is no scholar, but there is unusual depth about the information he imparts.

Driving back across the plain one night he pointed out a single line of gum trees on the western ridge.

"Them trees do look lovely in the evening light," he said. "You can only catch them like that ten minutes before sunset."

As we drove along in the jolting buck-board, he talked of cars, and aeroplanes, and new inventions, and lamented the loss of the old arts, like pottery and tapestry, and so back to Cornish memories of village industry, and how his mother made all the family clothes, even his father's trousers.

"Six foot two in his stockings he was, and she laid him out on the floor with the stuff underneath him and then she walked around him with the chalk and scissors. I reckon mothers don't work like that nowadays," he added.

Then he fell to talking of the Blacks and what a grand life they must have had when they could roam, undisturbed, over the whole country, fishing and spearing; and of the Aboriginal Protection Act which he declared was not protective at all; and of the nature of the Aborigines.

"They be real Socialists; what one has the other takes half."

In his rambling talk Zackie will hit on many a pithy judgment of creed and clan.

He is the keenest and most hopeful of sportsmen. I shall never forget the day when we all went duck shooting to the Grove. It is a beautiful spot ; giant Figs and Leichhardts, Gums and Ti-trees grow along the banks of the sandy creek, and in the still dark water-holes you see turtles swimming, and black duck, and burdikin duck, and coots. We had disturbed all the wild-fowl in the creek, had shot two duck, and were ready to go home ; but, noticing a rain-cloud coming over the plain, we waited, to shelter under an immense Leichhardt tree, sitting on its knobbly trunk. It was not so much a cloud as a grey pall, joining earth and sky, that swept ever nearer, swallowing up our foreground as it came. The air felt leaden and the grey wall advanced with a swish of driving rain, passed beyond us and blotted out all the grass and trees on the farther side of the creek.

Zackie, however, was not going to waste his time in shelter. There he was, crawling out towards the storm, on hands and knees, to a water-hole some hundred yards out on the plain ; looking with his crouching figure, old grey suit and battered hat, exactly like some shifty poacher. At last he ranged on one knee and took deliberate aim. We had an anxious moment, for there was always some uncertainty about the behaviour of Zackie's gun.

Bang ! at last, and soon after he was back again, drenched by the tropical storm, but happy, crouched

beside a hollow stump, plucking some dark object discerned through the rain, plucking as if for his life.

It was only a coot.

Another day we took him down to the coast for a fishing picnic. We tried to net the tidal creek, but the mesh was too big and although he plunged in and stood waist deep in the water, holding up the net, shouting and jumping to frighten the fish back into shallow water, we had the disappointment of seeing one lovely mullet after another swim through and out to the open sea. So we left the net and repaired to the rocks by the Hawk's Nest. We were miles from any dwelling-place ; the sea was intense green-blue and dead calm. The Great Barrier Reef lay out there, where the islands shimmered in the heat-haze on the horizon, and the mirage shimmered too, so that all the sky-line was quivering with amethyst forms, and you never knew which were solid, and which reflection.

The Hawk's Nest has been there twenty years or more ; year after year the Fish-Hawk adds a few sticks to the venerable pile and rears a family. It stands on a rocky pedestal, surrounded on three sides by the sea, and when there is a high tide it must be nearly a-wash. The little promontory leading to the nest divides two crescent beaches of golden sand, which go curving away to north and south as far as the eye can see.

We stood just beyond the Hawk's Nest fishing in deep water, our rods baited with pieces of raw shovel-nosed shark. Zackie had caught two of these brutes in the creek as they came down against the net, flinging them out triumphantly by the tail. The clear water washed the rocks on which we stood and every now and then we saw a flash of silver in the blue or felt a gentle bite as a small bream tried to suck off our bait.

Old Zackie had disappeared into the belt of emerald green scrub that fringes the beach on a slightly higher level. He had long ago given away his rod, so we imagined he had gone off with his blunderbuss in pursuit of scrub turkey. Not a bit of it. The fishing instincts in the old Cornishman will endure as long as life. He emerged from the scrub with a crooked dead stick, eight feet long, round the end of which he had twisted some rotten-looking twine, like wool on a card. To shorten the line he merely gave a twist or two to the long stick. Very soon he was on the outermost rock, up to his knees in water, watching his float with the most intent expression, and when he had a bite his excitement was such that you could almost feel the reef vibrating.

It was a falling tide and our chance of sport was becoming less with every hour, so, having caught three small bream and one blue-fish, we adjourned to the edge of the scrub for lunch, leaving the ever-

hopeful one at his post. In the middle of lunch we espied a lurching grey figure crossing the beach, with a stick pointed skywards, and then it disappeared on the seaward side of a reef of oyster-rocks that was almost high and dry.

Later on I strolled down across the wet beach with some oranges and meat pies for him. It must have been six hours since he breakfasted, but he hardly glanced at the food. The sea had almost receded from his rock, but he was still fishing eagerly, in shallow water, and told me in tones of deep excitement :

“ No, I ha’nt caught nothing yet, but I had two lovely bites.”

The tone of voice in which he pronounced the word “ lovely ” is not to be described ; it was half caressing, half greedy, and wholly possessive, as if no one in the wide world ever had such bites before.

Old sportsman as he was, well-seasoned, well versed in the ways of bird and beast and fish, there was nothing professional or confident about him ; he would follow every quest with the thrill and wonder of childhood’s expectancy.

II

The Poet

I had always suspected that Zackie was as much poet as sportsman, and his description of opossum

hunting confirmed my suspicions. For long months he had been engaged in it as a means of livelihood, but it had never lost its charm. He was full of zest as any New Chum, and his voice had a hoarse tremble, peculiar to himself, whenever he told me about the opossums' eyes, and how they looked like two great balls of fire in the dark, putting his finger and thumb together to indicate their size.

Indeed, on the two occasions when he took me "possuming," he was much more bent on showing off those balls of fire than on procuring skins.

"You look for them 'possums' eyes up among the leaves ; they be just like stars. You can see them sparklin' up there like di'monds," he assured me.

His enthusiasm was so infectious that many a time I mistook a star for the opossum's eyes, before we actually saw the little animal in its weird and leafy haunt.

On our second night expedition we had two town friends with us, and Zackie was very much on his mettle. Directly after supper we three went out to the kitchen to find him. There he was, looking like a burglar in a melodrama, in his old grey flannel coat, trousers turned down over his heel, battered felt hat and empty pipe ; an acetylene lamp in one hand, and, slung at his side, an immense sack which gave him a more lurching appearance than ever ; with Billy, the dog, behind him.

We went slowly, flashing the brilliant light

upwards on to every gum tree ; it gave them a curious skeleton effect, the trunk and branches standing out like silver veins against the dark and drooping foliage. After long search, stumbling over logs and stumps in the grass as we gazed upwards, we came to a gigantic skeleton gum with no leaf or twig ; its gaunt grey arms were naked against the midnight sky. Just above its charred base was a hollow, reminiscent of a black's burying place. No 'possum could we see though Billy barked furiously ; so we lit tapers of bark torn from the Ti-tree saplings and stuffed them into the hollow to smoke him out.

Very soon the smoke came curling out of a high branch and the 'possum was sighted on the tip of the branch. Then the excitement began. We all crowded round Zackie who, with trembling hands, focused the lamp on to the little animal, while he began his rhapsodies about "them eyes like di'monds."

I had a shot with the old gun, and missed, and then yelled to Zackie to give me another cartridge, but he was in a trance of excitement and deaf to my entreaties. For the moment the poet in him had got the upper hand of the sportsman, and he could only think of making our two friends see those flaming jewels, just as he saw them. One peered over each of his shoulders, and he kept on explaining, gesticulating, pointing, trying to get the eyes in

the right light for them. He was showman of the night and that was his one thought. I shook him, I pulled him, I searched every pocket on his person, till at last I found another cartridge and brought the 'possum down. All this time he was literally and physically unconscious of my presence and deaf to all my questions.

It was a most curious psychological study. He told me afterwards that he had no idea I had fired two shots and that he never even felt me searching and shaking him ; and he added :

“ You'd make a good one on a race course, you would.”

One of Zackie's pet subjects was bird-song at dawn. He talked so much about the sweet notes of a little brown bird, which he termed a bush canary, that my interest was really roused, and despite the mockeries of the family I made a rendezvous with the old man.

He came tapping on the veranda outside my room just before daylight, and I dressed hurriedly to hear the canaries sing. I went down to his camp where he lives, by his own choice, apart from the other men ; in a tent, with all his worldly belongings and a two-wheeled sulky outside it. He calls it Mountain View, because, standing at the entrance of his tent, he can look over the plain to a range of mountains, blue as the sea, some twenty miles away.

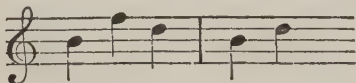
It was indeed a chorus of morning song that we

heard just below Mountain View : twittering, trilling, whistling. It was just light, that is to say, we could look across the plain to the mountains and could distinguish all large objects by their form, but the colour of the birds was still invisible. Colour is always the first to fade when light grows dim, and the last to awaken at the touch of dawn.

We stood under a dark-leaved fig tree and listened to that trilling canary, and at last I caught sight of the quivering little bird with wide open beak against the sky.

“ Now I reckon that’s teaching, don’t you ? ” said Zackie solemnly. “ They be giving thanks before their new breakfast. They ain’t had nothing yet. An’ some of us are always grumbling, an’ very often I reckon we ain’t got no cause to grumble at all.”

Then he took me up the stony hill-side ; from the very top of it came those unforgettable flute-like notes :



whistled with such a clearness you feel it is a birth-song, echoing, in the dawn of an unfurnished world. The little melody is never finished, but it is all the more haunting for that break in the middle, vibrat-

ing with the promise of some beauty that will never quite reveal itself.

We saw the bird on the highest branch of a little gum tree that grew on top of the hill, a black and white bird with a large bill ; he belongs to the shrike family. He was pouring out his song to the stormy morning sky, where rain clouds and the clearness of dawn atmosphere each struggled for the final victory. There was no molten sky in the east, only a faint, pink flush among the storm clouds.

"Thank you, Zackie," I said when the bird had flown away. "I wish we could write a poem on that."

In the discussion that followed this remark I first heard his memorable definition of a poet : "I think a poet, what you might really call a poet, is one of them with sense, what has a real understanding. That's what poetry is."

I never suspected him of writing poetry, though I had long known that the real thing filled a large part in his rather lonely life ; but there was another surprise in store for me, almost the last surprise of all.

It was a week before I was to return to the old country, and all the men we could collect had come in for a sing-song ; the old piano was tremulous, and the white scales had long ago been removed from the notes, to serve as spoon-bait for fishing, but the singing was hearty and every man contri-

buted a song. When it came to Zackie's turn, he declared he was no musician, but, being pressed he said :

“ Well, I'll tell you some verses that I wrote the other Sunday when we come back from that pig-hunt in the Ti-tree swamp. The name is :

THE GRAND PICTURE SHOW.

“ I work on a station a long way from town,
And for a week's work get five bob and a pound.
Lots of fresh air and little temptation,
I tell you it's jolly to work on a station.
You idle young men, half starved more's the pity,
Thick as the bees in a hive in the city,
Show them you're Britons with plenty of push
And roll up your swags and come into the Bush.
There is plenty of work if you're willing to do it,
And when settled down you never will rue it ;
For there's shearing, dam-sinking, and ploughing and
mowing,
And things you will learn that's well worth the knowing.
And if on occasion you long for some fun
In the bush you can get it with rod or with gun.
And I'll bet my last dollar you'll loudly exclaim
' I never will live in the city again.'
So take my advice young men in the city,
Roll up your swags and whistle this ditty
' I'm going to the country where the wattle trees grow,
Where from morning till night 'tis one grand picture
show.' ”

Criticize it, if you care to do so ; correct the scansion, modify the rhymes ; but, whatever you may say, there is a soul in those verses, the soul

of his adopted country as seen through the eyes of a wandering Cornishman.

It was a sad moment when I said good-bye to Zackie. I had many last messages for the old country and directions to look up his people in Mousehole and to tell them he was coming home next year.

Alas, Zackie has been taking that trip home for many years now, and his friends humour him whenever he announces it ; but they all know that the trip will end where it began, in the nearest town ; and that his real home now is the Bush, among the birds and animals that he loves and understands with his untutored soul.

CHAPTER XV

MR. DANIEL BUZZA

THE thought of Mr. Daniel Buzza always conjures up a memory of our Mothers' Meeting Christmas teas ; he and they are joined in thought for all time, like flowers and the garden, like sunshine and the summer.

They were pre-war of course. Women's Institutes have reached us, even us, and we do not have such things as Mothers' Meetings now. They involve plain-sewing and patronage, and both are out of date. As for teas, we only have fêtes in these enlightened days, and we always call them Feetes ; we advertise their attractions, always the same attractions, on flimsy yellow paper, and we stick those bills on post and hoarding, wall and shed, till the country is less green than yellow.

Although at those Christmas teas we had, year after year, the same jokes and stories, the same slides and hymns, yet we were never dull and we never could have been dull while Mr. Buzza was among us, for was he not fitted to an entertainment as the knife-blade to the handle, and did he not understand all

our ways and thoughts, being indeed one of ourselves? Once, in a mood of ambition or restlessness, we had a conjuror instead of our old friend, and the evening was most dreary. Mrs. Tiddy voiced the general feeling as she creaked down the stairs afterwards in her elastic-sided boots, and out past the wooden wash-tubs into the starlight :

“ Twadden like Mr. Buzza. We der unnerstan’ he. We der like ter know what’s a-comin’.”

There never was a man more worthy of his popularity than Mr. Daniel Buzza of Nancassick. He was good all through, and he owed nothing to chance and inheritance, or to any effort other than his own. Starting life as a buddle-boy at Wheal Jane, then working underground, and, later on, hawking boot-laces and smallware from house to house, he had enjoyed a wide survey of men and things from many a different angle, and now had come to be the most respected man in the parish ; being not only rate-collector and overseer, lay reader to the Church, and an eloquent preacher on occasion, but also the only man among us who owned and worked a magic-lantern. As a temperance lecturer he never had a rival, and in that rôle, long after he became a family man, he continued his wanderings up and down the county. He must have somehow acquired a competence, for, towards the end of his life, most of his work was done for love and not for money. He owned a pleasant little house and garden with a tiny

annexe built against the parlour. This den, known as Mr. Buzza's office, measured six feet by four and was filled from floor to ceiling with books and papers and boxes of slides. All his life he had had chances of collecting strange bits of local knowledge, for he met the people of remote places on equal ground, and all his life he had used his chances, for he never forgot an anecdote. If you wanted to know anything about a man, woman or child within a radius of six miles, he could give you the character and life-history, inside and out, and his head was a full repository of local lore, belief and custom.

Long and lean, with square hard hat, square coat-tails and heavy boots, the lay reader carrying his black bag was the most familiar figure in the parish. Harsh voice and penetrating eyes, a sense of humour that found food in every place and a sense of duty that directed all his footsteps—such was Mr. Daniel Buzza of Nancassick, the hamlet that lies between St. Melyan and Ponsongath.

We opened our Christmas entertainment as a matter of course with the tea, beginning with a sung grace as we stood wedged in between bench and table, looking down on the plates of saffron cake and buttered splits. Mr. Buzza would tune up for us in tones that were earnest rather than musical; he always confessed that trying to pitch on the right note in church made him feel "cold as a quilkin," for the gift of music was not his and education could

not help. It was a silent meal as a rule, but we ate and drank steadily and warmed up to the entertainment. After tea we would clear the table and turn the seats, while he hung the sheet, and Miss Tripcona, the laundress, lit the lamps. When we were ranged in order, the old ladies on chairs in front, the middle-aged ones on forms and the younger people trying to strike easy attitudes as they perched on the mangle, then Mr. Buzza would begin.

Sometimes he would bring in a new story, but it was always the old ones that we liked best, and the evening never was complete without the tale of Penna's van. This was a long and rhymeless poem describing a journey to Tregew on market-day, inside that well-known vehicle. Penna's van is wheelless now and serves as a hen-roost in Mr. Curgenven's yard, but its reputation still survives. There was no incident from beginning to end of the poem, but the conversation was like real life; what she said to he and what he said to she was all most faithfully recorded, and every one of us, as we listened, could hear the rattling of that bus and the crack of Penna's whip, could feel our neighbour's basket poking our ribs and the draught coming in from the door, could watch the milestones slowly pass, and experience that journey from beginning to end.

Then we always had the story of Jan Combellack's boy, Tobias, a proper li'l lem he was, and how he clunked a bully while he was gammutting about in

the townplace ; and how old Granfer Combellack, who had been mazed as a curly these score o' years, began to call for stillwaters ; and how Jemima Ann, the gurl, who always was a nosy holla-pot, runned for the doctor and there was narry one at home ; and how Mrs. Combellack was that hurried she began for to screech like a whitneck until she was took with a quam ; and how Tobias, a proper li'l lem he always was, runned up to the arish-mow where they old mots was lying and turned a crickmole and thrawed up that there bully agen.

There was a delightful ease about Mr. Buzza's talk. One thing led to another, and he held us all with anecdote and story, as he spoke of superstition, charm and cure, each one connected with St. Melyan and the things and people familiar to us. Here are a few set down at random, and losing much in interest because they have not the connecting link of his personality, which made one flow into another as naturally as the events in a history.

There are many cures for warts ; you steal a piece of beef and rub it over them, or you find and slice a taty, or you pick the first blackberry, applying them to the warts in the same way. Jimmy Pendower, who was still living in Nancassick in those days, had another method ; he " picked up so many stones as he had warts, rubbed them over, putt en in a little bag, tinged en up, an' thrawed en away next day."

To cure a sty you kiss a whitewashed wall nine times, or you rub the tail of a tom-cat nine times over the eye of a girl, and the tail of a she-cat nine times over the eye of a boy ; or you use this charm :

“ I pote thee and I pote thee
And I pote not thee but the Quailaway.”

It is well known that some hair from a donkey's shoulder will cure the whooping cough, if hung round the neck of the patient, and that you can cure toothache by going to the church-door, putting your hand on the fifth nail, and saying the Creed backwards.

Every woman of sense can tell you that the heart of a calf roasted, with pins stuck into it, will cause acute pain to the person who has laid spells ; that in cases of nose bleeding you must let the last drop hang, and that the time to have your hair cut is when the moon is growing. The moon can also help with corns ; if they trouble you, you have only to see the new moon out of doors, to bare your feet to her and say :

“ Corns down here, narry one up there.”

One of the most powerful charms for a scald or burn is this :

“ Two little angels came from the East
One brought fire and one brought frost
Out fire in frost
In the name of the Holy Ghost.”

For childish ailments the mouse and the donkey are both of use. You have but to catch and kill a mouse, to roast the animal till it is black, to pound it up in a basin of milk and give it to the child to drink ; or, should you prefer the other remedy, you put a slice of bread on a handkerchief, you carry and give it to a donkey, you put the remaining crumbs in a basin of milk and give it to the child. These cures have never been known to fail.

He would always end with some incident that he had himself witnessed, such as this :

“ I well remember, thirty-eight years ago, attending the funeral of Rebecca Pelmear at St. Melyan church. I saw there a little boy with a white handkerchief round his neck, which he dropped into the grave. He had been taken to the bedside of the female corpse, her hand had been placed nine times round his neck and the handkerchief tied round it was to be worn until the funeral. As the handkerchief rotted in the grave, so the abscess on his neck would disappear.”

Another favourite anecdote was the tale of Gussie Whetter, who had a quingy in his throat and was taken by his mother to the wise woman of Mevagissey. This woman was a posthumous child and the seventh in the family, consequently she was gifted with the power of curing a quingy by the simple method of blowing into the child's mouth. And Gussie Whetter, although haaf-saved, is alive

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to tell the tale to-day, as we all know, for does he not carry the telegrams from Trewhiddle to Ponsongath?

In the silence that followed such a story Mr. Buzza would turn to adjust his lantern, and then, year after year, just before he struck the match, one of us would plead, "Tell us the tale of the donkey first, Mr. Buzza."

I wish I could pass on that story as he told it. It was a little bit of real character acting, and, if critics think that he overdid the "Haws" of the vicar, let them remember his audience. Some of us were old and deaf and could only catch the high lights of a story, and, for a few simple souls, the whole comedy of the tale lay in those reiterated "Haws." It ran something like this:

The vicar entered the cottage rather pompously and sat down, when Mrs. Choak had dusted a chair.

"Good morning, Mrs. Choak." Mr. Buzza threw out his chest and his tones assumed a fullness and condescension quite unnatural to them. "How are you, Mrs. Choak? and—haw—how is your good man? and John Charles?—haw—and Elizabeth Ann?—haw—and Maud and Kezia? and—haw—the baby? I was very glad—haw—my good woman, to see you in church on Sunday, and I was—haw—extremely gratified to see what interest you took in my sermon. May I ask—haw—my good woman,

what point—haw—it was that moved you so much ? I saw you take out your handkerchief and dry your eyes.”

Mrs. Choak hesitated, and here Mr. Buzza relapsed into his natural tones which were exactly those of Mrs. Choak.

“ Well, sir, ’twas like this.”

Here several of us began to titter, anticipating the point.

“ I ad a lil dunkey wanst an I ded deearly love that lil dunkey. E used ter foller me aroun like a cheeld, in an out an all aroun. Aw, but e was a lil beauty ! I never seed another like en an I never shall no more. Well, wan day e took sick an Mr. Chegwidden come an a couldn’t do nawthen. An I set up o nights an e jus grew waiker an waiker. Aw, but twas whisht te see en mutting with is mait ! An after fower days e died, an I said ‘ I’ll never ave another lil dunkey not ef I live ter be so old as Anna Maria Crowgey.’ Well, sir, las Sunday when I went ter church I set down an listened to ee praichin away up there in the box, an I heerd your voice a-goin ‘ Hee-haw, hee-haw.’ ” Here we all started at Mr. Buzza’s voice, for it seemed as if Brother Ass himself were in the room with us. “ An ^{it} putt me in min o my deearr lil dunkey ; ’twas jus like e used ter call me, ‘ Hee-haw, hee-haw,’ an I thot ter meself ‘ My lil dunkey’s dead an buried an I shannt never see e no more ’ ; an I was forced ter screech a brae

while. An that's ow 'twas you seed me a-wipin o me eyes."

The vicar's reply, if he ever made reply, was always drowned in our applause.

After the donkey was disposed of we would settle ourselves to enjoy the slides, and that magic-lantern show was truly an entertainment only to be described as rich. It was neither wholly grave nor gay ; there was a little of everything in it. There was never any short measure in what Mr. Buzza said or did, he put the same heartiness into a joke and a maxim, and he got full value out of both. I wish I could remember it all, but only a few things stand out now.

We were taken down a mine ; we worked with the underground party ; we watched them pick and shovel and load the trucks, we watched them having croust ; we recognized a friend or two, including Mr. Buzza himself, with a tallow candle in his hat ; we came up by the man-engine and some of the surface machinery was explained to us.

Then we travelled ; we saw Jerusalem and St. Paul's Cathedral, Vesuvius and Trafalgar Square, and the mosque of St. Sophia ; we also saw—and these were of far more immediate interest—the sea-front at Penzance, the streets of Mousehole and Newlyn, and Mr. Calamansack's general store in Tregew, with Mr. Calamansack himself standing in the doorway. Then the words of a hymn would be

flashed on to the sheet, and we would all sing "Rock of ages," or "Just as I am," old Mrs. Tiddy's cracked tones rising high above the rest, after which we went on to the Snake Series.

What were those seven deadly serpents typifying seven deadly sins, and what was the appointed punishment for each, I can only dimly remember, but the echoes of Mr. Buzza's eloquence are with me still, as he declaimed against them one by one. As a grand climax he always ended with intemperance and the picture of a man at the bottom of a pit, wrestling in agony with the most gigantic, coiling snakes. Whether he came out or no, I do not, at this distance of time, dare to assert, but I do not think he had a sporting chance. The impression of horror was most potent and the way in which those sins were visualized as writhing reptiles was enough to haunt the young and scare the old.

A lighter set of pictures came after the snakes, and our well-known friend in the night-cap was once more shown in bed. A succession of rats, head following tail, close as sausages dropped from a machine, went running up the white counterpane with horrible clockwork movements. Can we ever forget those black forms against the white bed-clothes? The sleeper's jaw moved with the regularity of a piston, as rat after rat disappeared within the sleeper's mouth. The agony was prolonged until some of us shrieked aloud, and we could not but

wonder, would the rats ever come out at the other end? But they never did.

Then there was the series with Hope clinging to the cross. Her back was turned to us and she was dressed in a nightgown, her hair fell down to her waist, the cross was planted on an inaccessible rock and her bare feet were washed by the waves of the sea; but still she clung there, year after year, till our arms ached for her.

Last of all and best remembered came the Tiger and the Tub. I can see the heroes now, Mr. Long and Mr. Short, careering over the desert. Am I mistaken when I affirm that they wore top-hats and sky-blue trousers? Let that be as it may, the colouring of those slides was wonderful; I know those desert palms were the greenest plants I ever saw, they were a green that never was on land or sea, and half the tiger's ferocity was lost in the glamour of his black and gold stripes. How they ran and circled, those two heroes, how they caught the tiger in a barrel and tied his tail in a knot outside the bunghole, how the tiger, with his new home on his back, pursued them across the yellow desert, how Mr. Long, with legs like a pair of tongs, escaped to the horizon, and how Mr. Short swarmed up the stem and clung to the fronds of a palm-tree; who can ever forget that breathless story? I can see it all, the green and gold and black, the rapid movement, and once again I feel the unequalled thrill.

Truly like the works of Homer, Shakespeare and the other great ones of the world, that tale of the Tiger and the Tub was always vivid, always new.

When Mr. Buzza had put out his lantern and packed away his slides, when Miss Tripcona had kindled the lamps once more, when the Christmas presents had been distributed and every one was holding her unopened parcel on her knees with an air of supreme indifference to the contents, then we knew that the moment had come for the very last part of the programme.

Mrs. Tiddy would always require some pressing, for she did not sing duets between Christmas and Christmas, but her seniority, her memory, and her high-pitched voice all gave her the right to stand up with Mr. Buzza and give us "Come and I will sing you"; then also the pressing was itself part of the performance and we were all of us ready to do our part.

Not that they literally stood up before the audience in formal fashion; it was all quite homely. He leaned against the mangle in cavalier attitude, with his arms folded, and she sat on her wooden chair by his side, with the sequins in her bonnet nodding, and her tippet drawn about her shoulders. Her face was like yellow parchment and her lips were nearly lost, being drawn in over her toothless gums. Always a small woman, she was now shrunk with age, but she was remarkable because vitality came out of

her with every look and word, out of her deep-set black eyes and her bronchial sing-song voice. When she laughed it was like drawing one rough surface over another, and with her top notes you felt the earth cracking beneath your feet.

She would strike up, "Come an' I will sing you." And he would reply, "Wha-at will you sing me?" There was always a false start or two, both their voices wandering up and down the register like lost spirits. When they had pitched to their satisfaction the question and answer went on: "I will sing you one, O," she piped in her cracky treble; and he with his uncertain tenor made wavering, raucous answer; "Wha-at is your one, O?" Then they were fairly started and she gave out her first piece of information: "One of them is all alone and ever shall remain so."

The same prelude of questions and statement went on to an ascending scale of numbers, like the House that Jack built, so that by the time the last verse was reached the completed song ran thus:

"Come and I will sing you
What will you sing me?
I will sing you twelve, O
What is your twelve, O?
Twelve are the twelve apostles
Eleven of them are gone to heaven
Ten are the ten commandments
Nine is the moonshine bright and clear
Eight is the great archangel

Seven are the seven stars in the sky
Six is the cheerful waiter
Five is the ferryman in the boat
Four is the Gospel Preacher
Three of them are strangers
Two of them are lily-white babes, clothèd all in green O.
One of them is all alone and ever shall remain so."

Sometimes, if Mrs. Tiddy were in good voice, and if the brown Titus had not been over-troublesome during the autumn, the pair would give us also this other rendering, set to another tune.

" Oh, come and I will sing you
I will sing you twelve O
Twelve are the gates of heaven
Eleven are the gates of hell
Ten is begin again
Nine is the moonshine
Eight is the daybreak
Seven are the stars of heaven
Six is the crucifix
Five is the Dilly-hour
Four is the Dilly-bird
Three is the Trinity
Two is God's only Son
One is God Almighty, teacher of the right-y
And who can learn so well as we ? "

The longer version was, however, the general favourite, for there was more rhythm and smoothness in the melody and the words were more familiar.

Can one wonder that the conjuror, with all his tricks, fell flat when compared with such an evening ? When we went home from the Mothers' Meeting

Teas, we took all that mortal woman can desire : we had been given food for thought and food for mirth, hymn-singing and a little preaching, a good tea, music and a good laugh.

Mr. Buzza died in harness ; his days were full to the end, so full that much of his knowledge departed with him, for he never had time to set it down in writing. He died among all his friends, in the open air on a summer day. He was in the Vicarage garden helping at a parish tea when he dropped down dead of heart failure. His last words were that grace he had sung so often, " Be present at our table, Lord." Then he went to carry forward a bench for some late arrivals and his end came.

Mrs. Tiddy is still alive with the sequins nodding in her bonnet. The brown Titus gets a stronger hold of her every winter, and sometimes her voice sounds as if it were escaping in a cracked pipe through the top of her head, but her wheezing cough has lost nothing in heartiness and her eyes are bright as ever.

Only, if she ever sings the old songs now, she sings them all by herself since Mr. Daniel Buzza is gone, for her grandchildren take no interest in such old-fashioned words.

CHAPTER XVI

VOICES

HAVE you ever considered that if we talked less we should not only hear more, but lead a richer life? I do not suggest that every day we could gather pearls falling from the lips of our fellow-men. The voices of which I am thinking have not a human origin; they do not move lips in speaking or emphasize meaning with gesture; you can read no visible sign of word or whisper by study of the features behind them, but they are what a voice always was and will be, the expression of a personality.

In order to hear them you must forget yourself entirely, come right out of the shell of your self-consciousness. In using that little word "you" I do not presume to harangue the world in general or my neighbour; I am simply talking to myself, at myself; which one is the real self I cannot tell. Well, you cannot as you listen to them frame an answer or remain aware of mutual colloquy; you must enter into them. Yet, if one were to say that you must embrace or penetrate these beings, the

metaphor would include your personality as one outside their own, either as throwing arms round or forcing a way in like a pointed knife. And both the metaphors would be, for this very reason, misleading; your personality simply does not count.

Without any perceptible journey thither, you are suddenly inside them, you are them, or they are you. Express it how you will, there is only one individuality filling the whole world, and that one is clear and articulate as a voice.

Only think of them, of all the silent beings ever at your gate. The gnarled oak-trunk, the green shadow, the shade-loving weed, the brilliant flower, all living their own lives, expressing their own selves. Sometimes you stop to admire, but that is an outside act and only emphasizes the gulf between you and them. Sometimes you have not even time for that mute homage. If you want to understand them you must go alone and slowly, you must go empty of thought and desire; then the green shadow will speak to you and the scarlet flower will sing aloud, and the blue petal will utter nameless secrets; and, although their voices are not to be transmitted or recorded in human phrase, you will have heard new tones, made new friends and enlarged your circle of love and knowledge.

The first place where I heard one of those voices was in the Garden of Peace. It was at the time

crook-sticks and baskets, and faces as clean as usual, and return tired and torn, with hands and lips and faces dyed all over with the dark juice. Some say it was the blackberry juice which the ancient inhabitants used for frightening away the Roman legions; but nothing positive is now known. It is, however, the fact that the Cornish dye just as much of themselves as is visible with blackberry juice once a year; and this may be a survival of an ancient custom. Just for a wonder, it was neither saint nor piskie who was quoted in connection with blackberries, but Old Nick himself, who ate so many one thirteenth of September that he felt real ill, and he cursed the fruit with such a terrible curse that, after the fatal thirteenth, the fruit is said to be unfit for food, and is allowed to rot where it grows.

If the blackberry isn't a native, it ought to be, considering the impudent way in which it takes possession of the hedges and fences, scrambling over everything, and sucking in all the sunshine which comes out of the sky. Anywhere, everywhere it grows, even along the bleak sea-cliffs washed with sea-spray and ruffled with bitter winds; but the fruit is most sweet and generous when growing in sheltered spots on moor and in valley. We were told to be sure to have blackberry pie, and we had it at the farm; and if the immortals didn't envy us when eating blackberry pie, smothered with Mrs. Andrawartha's cream,

it's proof positive that they don't know about one good thing in the eating line.

The Wesleyans are especially fond of blackberries. Of course there's a reason for it. The Bookworm stumbled on it, as usual, and we went to the circuit minister, who said he was quite right, and it was the fruit which kept John Wesley alive on St. Hilary downs. The story is all right, and can be verified in print. Here it is: "One day we had been preaching on St. Hilary down. As we returned, John Wesley stopped his horse to pick the blackberries, saying, 'Brother Nelson, we ought to be thankful that there are plenty of blackberries, for this is the best county I ever saw for getting a stomach, and the worst I ever saw for getting food.'" Guy said there ought to be a blackberry day as well as a primrose day. Why not? White roses and orchids are consecrated to other illustrious persons, and why not blackberries to John Wesley?

Of course the blackberry has its legend, and this is one as it was told to us.

THE ROMANCE OF PRINCESS OLWEN.

The fairest princess in Cornwall, as every one knew, was the daughter of Bran Dhu, and it was the surprise of every one that his daughter should be so fair when he was so dark, dark as his own black heart; and that was dark enough, in all

the wind's power is co-extensive with space knowing no limit nor curb.

With a single breath the wind can transform an ocean and circumfuse a world. He blows one blast, and the whole Atlantic heaves in tumult ; not an islet or bay is unaware of his coming, and the clouds of heaven mass with vain resistance, or are scattered into trailing forms.

In sky and earth and sea he meets with none to thwart his will. With a great rhythmic rush he passes on his unopposed career, yet, in his passing, his power has not gone. He has but led the way, impressing the very elements into his service ; light and shadow, colour and wave, they follow in his circular course with the very same rhythm that was his.

He is at the same time everywhere and nowhere, informing all the world with his spirit. Never will he show himself, a living entity against a background.

All the great bosses of the earth, and all the hollowed depressions, mountain, plain and valley, the cumulus clouds of heaven and the repetitional billows of ocean, even the fragile forms of petal, leaf and reed, he takes for his own, as if they were but harp-strings made for his desire. He plays upon them at his own sweet will and his music is transmuted by their varying forms into a gentle lullaby among the pine needles, a loud resounding roar in

the sea, and a far-away rustle from the drying heather-bells.

Nor does he only range at will over moving tides and silent pools, over mute, hard forms of rock and soil and tree ; but such elusive beings as shadow, fog and sunbeam he snatches up to harness in his train, hurrying them hither and thither, dropping them among the magic footprints that he leaves behind.

Trackless and uncontrolled, he has the broad sea and the many-peopled earth for his familiar playing-ground, while his home is in the distant sky, perhaps within those golden gates that close at every sunset before our yearning eyes. From that aery home in the clouds he looks down on the earth, as on a little green island in space, and on the sea as on a blue pool. He breathes once, like a giant turning over in sleep, and, lo, there are faint white lines on the blue, the crests of broken water ; but the green island spins on as ever, unresponsive to his signal.

Then he rouses himself and comes down in mock wrath with a flurry of determination to make himself heard and felt, and with another breath he fills the mountain ranges with hollow sound, and eddying up every valley into sequestered nooks, like a rising tide, he leaves not a branch unstirred. Every stone and furrow can feel the touch of his invisible hand.

And the grass, attendant on his lightest murmur,

will sway and whisper long after the last eddy has died away, crooning to herself :

“ My Lord and Master is strong and loud and very mighty, but, when he stoops to me, his touch is the most gentle thing in all the world.”

II

The Sea

What's the sea for ? Many a one has wondered.

“ To navigate,” said the sailor.

“ To bathe in,” cried the children.

“ To guard us,” shouted the angry nations.

“ It means oblivion,” said the traveller.

“ It gives daily bread,” muttered the fisherman.

“ It is the ever-changing, illimitable, inexpressible element,” sang the poet.

“ It is my harp-string,” roared the wind, “ tuned to carry my voice to the uttermost bounds of earth.”

“ It's home,” screamed the sea-gull.

“ It is the cruel, ever-waiting one,” wept the sailor's mother.

“ It is joy,” said laughter-loving Aphrodite, as she rose from the foam.

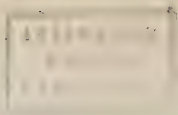
And the man who had lost his soul found it by the sea. The little daily burdens and daily worries dropped away from him like scales, and as he looked out over the sea he thought of birth and life and

death, and he began to understand the meaning of things.

He had come out into a great space, and light flooded every dark corner of his mind. He realized that colour and sound and the rhythm of the waves were realities, not mere words, not symbols or poetic terms; that eating and drinking and doing business were shadows of a dream world.

His mind took wings and left the solid earth. Birdlike he hovered and careered through space, with new vision and a new heart.

Manlike, godlike, he wended home with strength and courage for the battle.



CHAPTER XVII

THE FOOL OF THE FAMILY

SIMON was the fool of the Bosvathick family. All the world said so.

For the family made money and kept it, while he did neither, and the family were never worsted in a bargain, while he had never been known to score a point by chance or cunning.

There is no doubt he was the fool of the family. Those who judge empirically affirmed it without hesitation. The proof of the pudding was in the eating, they always maintained; and Simon lived in a quiet way, while his brothers and cousins had position and also power. They would always make good, breasting the current of life, surmounting adversity and snatching at fortune, but he had ever been like a cork at the mercy of the waves.

He was indeed the fool of the family and his relations did not attempt to deny it. If he played cards he always lost. Whenever he hunted his horse would go lame; and if he took shares in a business it did not prosper. Providence itself seemed to be in league with Simon's folly to bereave

him of the things that made life worth living. His father disinherited him without apparent cause, his wife died and he never had a child. He plodded on, in a career that was never congenial to him, with an industry that could not be denied, but promotion did not come his way and men more shallow and pushing were exalted over his head.

The figure that he cut in the limelight was the figure of an amiable nonentity, weak, honest, ineffectual. His very hand-shake was feeble and his manner deprecating. When he smiled he gave a curious one-sided twitch to his face. But—

“ God be thanked the meanest of His creatures
Boasts two soul-sides ; one to face the world with,
One to show a woman when he loves her.”

Well, I, though I was not the woman that he loved, was fortunate enough to be brought in touch with the other side of Simon, with the real Simon if I may say so in the face of the world, the family and the empirical judges.

The first time I ever stayed in the same house with him, we met at his cousin's, on the eve of a big political meeting. He had been asked at the eleventh hour to fill a gap. Many guests were there and the latest arrival was a little man called Denver, brilliant, self-made, far superior in wit and understanding to anyone present, but obviously just a little ill at ease in that assembly, moving with the footsteps of Agag, consciously, carefully, among the

social niceties that are invisible to most of those who have set them up.

As I came down the wide staircase, dressed for dinner, I met Simon waiting in the hall, while a babel of voices issued from the drawing-room. He came up to me confidentially with a sidelong glance.

"I say, I do wish you'd just slip in and see if Mr. Denver's got on tails or a dinner-jacket and let me know and I'll follow suit. He may be the only one, and he'd feel so out of it."

I did his bidding with amazement. Not one of us had had the subtlety to grasp the whole situation and to act on it with the simple directness that Simon had shown. I always felt, from that moment, as if some scale had fallen from my eyes, as if I had been allowed a glimpse of the man's inner self, so to speak.

I never knew what were the circumstances that led to Simon's resignation just five months before his pension was due. Indeed, every one at the time was under the impression that he retired at the appointed hour on a comfortable annuity. When finally the truth came out, many people said, "Of course that's just what would happen to Simon." As if they thought that Providence, aspiring to consistency, directed a succession of misfires in Simon's life, and that this was only another link in the chain of preordained misfortune.

A few of us who knew less of the ways of

Providence and more of the habits of Simon suspected some quixotic motive at the back of his retirement ; but, whatever motive there may have been, the truth will go down with him to his grave.

About that time, much to the surprise of his prosperous relations, he applied for the Secretaryship of a local charity, a charity of old standing and well endowed. The Committee sifted the applicants down to two and then they summoned Simon for an interview.

I know nothing of the previous history of that Committee and little of what came after, but, if this particular transaction were a fair sample of their moral courage and their manner of facing an issue, I ask myself how they ever came to occupy a public position.

Simon sat there facing the Committee with a rather unexpectant look on his face, his old green felt hat before him on the table. The Chairman spoke :

“ We have examined your credentials, Mr. Bosvathick, and find them all that we could wish. The other applicant, Mr. Woolcock, has had none of your training and is not really so well suited for our work ; but we are informed that this post means bread and butter to him, or at any rate butter, while we understand that you are under no necessity of taking remunerative work. Under the circumstances, what would you wish us to do ? ”

Now Simon's speech never quite kept pace with his thoughts ; there was always some gap or hitch barring self-expression. He saw the whole situation quite clearly in a flash, but not till the following day could he put this thought into words :

" Do you choose your officers out of charity or for their capacity ? It is really a question for this Committee to decide, whether they want a Secretary who can do the work or one who will be grateful for the job. The decision is rightly yours, and I must abide by it."

At the time, however, he only gave the Chairman one straight look, picked up his hat and slipped out of the room, saying :

" I withdraw my application."

He never entered the labour market again.

I believe that after this episode he had very little butter in home life, but he was happy enough in his own way, with his poultry and his garden.

It must have been very shortly after that interview with the Committee, that Simon took a cottage and came to live in our village, but it is not easy to date or remember his arrival, for he seems always to have been one of us, a settled feature in the life of the place, just as the pump was, and the post office, and the *Golden Horn*.

Before I knew him I used to hear people say :

" Oh, Simon Bosvathick ; he may be a good

fellow but he doesn't shine in company. He never was a social success."

And then, after he had come among us and I had seen a little of his comings and goings and of his daily intercourse with his neighbours, I often used to wonder what they meant by sociability, and what they understood success to be.

I remember most vividly, though there is no particular incident connected with it, a chance meeting with him one morning. As I passed his cottage he came out of the gate.

"Mornin'," he said. "What a lovely day. Going to Farmer Hancock's sale?"

Now farm sales never have been in my line, but that would not occur to Simon; at any rate my way was his for half a mile, so we wandered down the village street together.

Old Nicholas was sunning himself on a chair outside his cottage door, a red and blue fuchsia on one side of him and the whitewashed wall behind.

"Well, Nicholas, how be the rheumatics? Gone for good 'n all?" said my companion cheerily.

"Aw, Maister Simon, doan't 'ee say no such thing. Did 'ee ever 'ear tell o' the rheumatics goin' away? Las' Saturday I roade in ter market in Jose's van, and the joustin' wi' my oal bones was somethin' crool. When I come home agen I says: 'Here I be an here I stops,' leastways till I go down ter the churchyard. Maister Simon, now, doan't 'ee be

movin' on till I've axed 'ee summut. They tells me you be churchwarden now? "

" Well, so I be," said Simon, surprised at the old Methodist's sudden interest in Church affairs. " What is it I can tell 'ee? "

" Well, I do want you ter guv me your word that I shann't be buried down on the nigher side where the stream do run. They do say tes that damp an cold in the winter, an tes no place for oal bones, an when I'm putt away I should like for to lay in the same place where they putt faather to, up along, where tes dry an fitty."

" All right, Nich'las, all right," said the new churchwarden in soothing tones. " But don't you talk of bein' putt away yet. If I'm here I'll see to it, but sure 'nuff the devil will come for me long before you're took. You've got a score o' good years yet, Nich'las. You keep movin', and as for the rheumatics and the churchyard let 'un bide, let 'un bide. 'Tis no good thinking on 'em. Good-bye, Nich'las."

A little farther on we met Mrs. Penberth with three of her offspring at the pump.

" Well, Mrs. Penberth, what about that there eye-ticket for Ellen Jane? "

The young thing in question looked up at us with the most disconcerting squint.

" Well, Maister Simon," said the mother, " tes like this. I told John Charles as 'ow you says

you'd guv me a ticket for Ellen Jane for the eye-doctor, an John Charles 'e up an says no cheeld o' his shann't go ter no such person. Tes a new-fangled notion settin' folks eyes right. An if Ellen Jane do look athurt, 'e says, why time alone will cure ut."

As Mrs. Penberth spoke, one eye looked at us and the other was fixed on the sky, and I thought what a touching faith was the faith of John Charles. A dozen years he must have lived with those contradictory eyes, but time's failure with his wife should in no wise quench his hope for Ellen Jane.

And we passed on.

Outside the *Golden Horn*, Mrs. Loam was tying up an ivy-leaved geranium and she gave us the time of day.

"Well, Mrs. Loam, an' how's business?" said Simon, stopping to hold the stem for her.

Old Mrs. Loam can seldom find a listener nowadays, for her trouble has no novelty, her "boy," Tom, having been subject to fits these forty years.

"Aw," she said, settling her hands on her hips for a good talk, "business ain't so bad, but my poor boy Tom 'e do grow wuss an' wuss I'm thinkin'. I sent en up ter Church Town ter fetch me 'ome a pot o' damson jam an what shu'd 'e do but a fall'd down with the lipsy in the middle o' the road an the jam was all scat abroad. I'm afered 'e'll never be no better an tes me only cheeld."

"Come, come, Mrs. Loam, 'tis no good screechin' and hollerin' before ye're hit, and Tom he've been a good son to you all his days."

"That 'e be, poor tender worm, an they do say 'e be the very daps of 'is poor faather."

Here she wiped her eye on the corner of her apron and I, seeing that Simon was about to be engulfed in the symptoms of epilepsy, pursued my errand.

Half an hour later I returned to find him still in the outskirts of the village, in earnest conversation with a new friend. He was leaning sideways over a gate, hat tilted far back on his head, thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat. Opposite him, standing against the granite post, was Pelly Bolitho. They were looking at some pigs in the field and discussing the weight and value of the animals, as if their own fortunes depended on the verdict.

I suppose Pelly is the most familiar figure in all that country between Pentire and Tolvern; yet who knows anything of his present life or his past history, who sees anything more in Pelly than a lurching figure with a red countenance, in a bowler hat green with age and a coat that hangs around his heels? Two or three days a week he may be seen on the road, droving animals home from market, and at any other time reeling in and out of the *Golden Horn*.

He is always described as "lowest of the low." Certainly he looks far lower in the social scale, less

well-groomed and far less happy than the pigs and cattle with which he associates. I do not imagine that any one of us has ever tried to raise Pelly even to our own poor level, while those who greet him on the road pass on with a sense of virtue like one who has given a coin to a beggar.

As the two men stood there discussing pigs, Pelly's shrunken figure was fully two inches higher than usual, and there was in his besotted countenance a look that was wholly human and almost intelligent. Whether Simon ever got as far as Farmer Hancock's sale that morning I do not know, for I left him to his *tête-à-tête*.

As time went on, Simon saw less and less of his relations. They had never sought him out, and now when chance did throw them together they felt no pride in the connection.

"Simon has grown so dreadfully local," they would say. "He can't open his mouth now without talking broad Cornish."

We all pride ourselves, of course, on our Cornish stock, and we are not ashamed that Cornish words should enrich our vocabulary; but when, without regard to place or company, you relapse into the vernacular, why then, you are sinking in the social scale. And Simon had certainly sunk.

He never suffered from the universal craving for self-expression. All his days he was immune from that fever-fit. It is not merely ludicrous to imagine

Simon painting a picture, or writing a poem ; it is simply and finally unthinkable. Simon an artist would be about as remarkable a prodigy as a daisy grown introspective. He simply lived without thinking or talking about life.

Nor was he one of those who lay foundation stones of village halls. I, being his contemporary, am hardly in a position to discuss his posthumous reputation. This much, however, is certain : Simon's name will not be written in monument of stone or legislation, for he never trod the path of public benefaction or public work. He will not leave his mark on outward things.

What he did, he did quietly, slipping in his good deeds sideways, dropping his kind words in low tones, while his simple friendliness would slide into odd corners like a sunbeam. And I know that when Simon goes the people in the village will miss his twisted smile, and the world will be the poorer for his silence.

CHAPTER XVIII

CHURCH COVE

THE old church stands hidden from the world, half-way down a winding lane that runs to the sea ; many miles from the railway, far from towns and traffic, at the remote end of a wild moorland peninsula. All the way down the lane, the knotted trees form an arch of green leaves ; they lean awry as if they had grown now hither, now thither, at the mercy of every chance impulse and passing wind.

The grey church is one of the oldest in these parts and the irregular traceries on the porch are already smoothed by green mould. Inside there is a beautiful reading-desk and font, and carving on the beams of the roof, and the hush peculiar to old country churches. It is not the hush of emptiness but rather a full silence where the very stillness is weighted with memory.

Even more impressive than those relics of olden time are the thoughts awakened by the memorial tablets on the walls. Here are no set perfunctory valedictions to departed friends ; each inscription

carries a warm remembrance of goodwill, of active life and lamented death.

There is no hint of the stagnation that one would expect in this remote corner of the land: a breath of the sea and of foreign parts is borne in nearly every phrase. In this little buried hamlet men have led lives that were neither wasted nor uneventful. They were all apparently soldiers or sailors or parsons. The parsons were active, many-sided, well-beloved; the others were full of adventure and high courage.

There must have been something simple and full of purpose about their lives. There is certainly something very simple and sincere about their memories. Real feeling escapes even through the rather formal words. There are none of those inflated Georgian epitaphs that distort the impression they are framed to convey. There is also a welcome absence of the texts and phrases which have come by dint of repetition to carry a message worse than meaningless, because full of churchyard associations.

Here lies the soldier who—

“was present at Waterloo with the ——
Regiment.”

And the sailor—

“late Commander of the —— Signal Station
when he died A.D. 1828 and was buried in this
churchyard, aged 54.”

And H.N.V.

“late of this parish who died when on passage to Buenos Aires off Montevideo on board the Royal Mail Steamer ‘Thames’ on Sept. 5.—aged 12 years and 9 months. He was buried in the British Cemetery at the Chacarita, Buenos Aires.”

And the hero of—

“Thornycroft’s Mounted Infantry who was killed on Active Service in S. Africa, Jan. 21. 1902.

A good soldier of Jesus Christ.”

What more perfect monument could heart of warrior desire than that simple statement of fact?

“He was a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”

Then there is a homely touch that brings one very close to the late rector. His children have so confidentially related the intimate side of his life that one is bound to respond to their confidence.

“The Rev. J.N.S. M.A.

During 27 years Rector of this Parish and of Ruan Major.

During 23 years he was resident here until severe bodily infirmity and the consequent necessity for prompt medical aid compelled him reluctantly to depart from the people by whom he was loved and revered from the place to which he was most attached. Amidst the

scenes where he spent his happiest days, to the memory of a sincere Christian, a benevolent Pastor and an indulgent parent, his three surviving children have gratefully inscribed this stone."

Last of all there is the life history of H.T.

"Twelve and half years Rector of this Parish
and of Ruan Major.

One of His Majesty's Justices of the Peace
for the county.

An affectionate relative, a zealous friend, a
minister scrupulous in the discharge of his
duties to his churches, and to the poor an
hospitable neighbour. A fearless and upright
magistrate
and

an honest man.

Was drowned whilst bathing at Kilcobben Cove
when his health promised a long period of
usefulness.

On the 8th day of July 1840 in the 44th year
of his age.

"Thy will be done."

How many a time one smiles at the abrupt turn
given to the meaning of the curtly divided lines,
but how full of real emphasis is that simple—

"and
an honest man."

Sitting there alone, in the hush of the little grey
building one feels that the walls are lined, not with

dead words, but with living presences ; and as each one stands out with individual features he attains, by means of a simple inscription, some measure of that life in death which we all unconsciously desire.

Following the course of the green lane that leads to the Cove one passes a row of cottages where all the homely occupations of the people are performed in the roadway. A lobster basket lies in the middle of the path, and a carpenter's bench where a man stands sawing a stake. There are suggestions of spring-cleaning in a carpet flung over the hand-rail that fences off the stream.

The cottage gardens are gay with white stocks and wallflowers, tree-mallow, fuchsia and climbing geraniums. Coils of rope hang on the hazels and elms that overhang the stream ; no man-made hooks or cupboards are needed here, for Nature provides them all. All the way down the lane there is a tangle of campion and hedge-parsley on either side, until, passing three deserted cottages and an old life-boat house, one comes suddenly to the Cove, a little beach with fishing boats drawn up, and a triangle of the bluest sea framed by a bluff of cliff to right and left.

Following an upward instinct one climbs the steeper cliff path on the left. The close-cropped grass is springy to the tread. In April it was covered with the vernal squill as with a blue mist, for the dainty little flowers, blue-grey on a ruddy stem, were

starred in profusion everywhere. Now only the half-transparent seeds are left, standing two inches high, like tiny silver ghosts.

There on the top of the cliff, with sky and water for one's world, the thoughts aroused in that little grey church return: thoughts of mortality and longings after immortality. And then the breaking waves of that infinite sea, relentless yet somehow reassuring, bring a message of death in life and life in death. The wave ends, but the sea remains and will remain.

CHAPTER XIX

THE LAST OF THEIR RACE

A NY student of physiognomy would have been deeply interested in those two brothers, the last representatives of one of the oldest families in the Duchy.

There was hardly any department in life or letters that did not owe a debt of gratitude to some Polgwin of the past. They had never been a race of soldiers, or sailors, or parsons ; they had never followed any particular calling from father to son, but one single trait had persisted through many generations, showing itself in the most diverse careers and conditions—whatever they did they did well. No skimping or short measure was ever permitted in work or play, and to such an extent had this single quality lifted them above their limitations that the family tree could boast of general, admiral, lawyer, divine, miner, agriculturist, each one not only successful but eminent in his day. The Polgwins had always had stuff in them, a certain unflinching fibre that resisted the wear and tear of time and change like the granite

of their native land. And now those two old bachelors were all that remained of the ancient and honourable family.

The first time I ever saw the younger brother I mistook him for a tramp at his own front door, and could hardly believe my ears when, as I was stepping forward to ring the bell, I heard him give an order to the gardener. He was not often seen in the haunts of men, for he lived the twilight life of a recluse among his books and coins. On that occasion he had emerged into the sunlight for a few moments, with a packet of seeds from the Antipodes, and a strange figure he presented: his battered felt hat would have disgraced a tramp and his clothes were baggy in all the wrong places by reason of his sedentary life. With that stooping form and unkempt beard, head sunk forward on his chest, feet shuffling as if he had trodden down his heels, furtive glance and stunted frame, he did not look like a scion of a noble race. Henry Polgwin was not one who ever sought or shone in the company of his neighbours, but in historic realms unknown to most of us he would wander like a familiar spirit, while in the world of coins and medals he was an authority without a rival. All the vitality of the race had apparently settled in his brain, leaving his physique to shift for itself.

As for Stephen he was like his forefathers in appearance: six feet in his stockings, dark and

square-headed with clear eyes, the cold blue eyes of a jackdaw, the best leg for a boot that ever was seen and no superfluous flesh from head to heel. But for all this he was not handsome, he had a habit of sticking out his under-lip as if in defiance of all the world, and was usually described as a hard-featured man. Compared with his younger brother Squire Polgwin was a well-dressed figure, though the world of fashion might have accorded him that epithet with some reluctance, for the cut of his everyday clothes had not varied in forty years.

A brown broad-cloth with curved seams over the shoulder-blades, deep pockets and rounded tails, snuff-coloured breeches and box-cloth gaiters over black boots, on his head one of those hybrids between top-hat and bowler that were nearly obsolete even in his day ; such was his everyday garb. The Squire had no use for variety or ornament in dress ; not that the family of Polgwin was impoverished, from the worldly point of view, whatever it may have been in the eyes of eugenist philosophers, but anything flash or showy found no favour in his eyes.

Stephen was no student like his brother, but his terse speech would have served for a model of English had it been taken down verbatim, so precisely did it always convey his thought without a word too much. He would flash his meaning out like a cut with a rapier. Language was no blunt

weapon in his hands, but those who looked for polish or the lesser amenities in their intercourse with him would always look in vain.

His woodcraft was unequalled and you could not puzzle him with any feather you might bring, or any anecdote of bird or animal life that you could tell. Where and when he acquired his knowledge no one knew: certainly it was not in the library, for the natural history books there were mostly uncut. His father had bought Gould's book on *The Birds of Great Britain* and other works, and Henry, who had charge of the library, had, by his brother's wish, kept it up to date in certain rural subjects. With the same carefulness he had his fields manured. But indoors the pride of possession had outlived, as it often does, the purpose of possessing, and the elder brother was far removed in spirit from that old Polgwin who had founded the library, reading every morocco-bound volume with reverence and care.

For many years the starlings had roosted in the Polgwin coverts, till the rhododendron leaves were black and white with their droppings and the whole shrubbery rank with the smell of them. One autumn when the flocks that darkened the sky were longer and broader than usual, a neighbour ventured the remark:

"What hundreds of starlings you have in your woods this year, Mr. Polgwin."

"Eighty-five thousand," he grunted, and the conversation fell to the ground.

And I wager that if human estimate could approximate the truth in such a case, then the Squire was very near it.

There were other occasions on which he did less than his share in keeping up a conversation begun in all friendliness. He was coming home by train once, with his guns and a brace of pheasants in the rack above him, when Kimiel Penhaligon stepped into his compartment and greeted him pleasantly : "Been shootin', Squire ? "

"D'you take me for a b——y poulterer ? " said the other, and he raised his newspaper to his face.

Then one day, across a luncheon-table, some fearless young bounder asked him what was clearly a leading question about the profit and loss of his latest farming venture. He made no reply. The temerarious one repeated his request for information, and in a general silence the Squire answered :

"I heard your question," and turned his attention to a bottle of pickled onions.

His mentality was lined and counterlined by the tradition of his forefathers, and sometimes he perpetuated their habits long after the principles that inspired those habits were dead. Thus it happened that the name of Polgwin headed every church subscription list, though the Squire had never,

since his majority, been inside a church except to attend a funeral; or so the rumour ran. But in this case rumour was not exactly informed, for I know that regularly once a year, on Christmas Day or thereabouts, he went to morning service to make sure that the family pew was not occupied by outsiders and that the Polgwin hymn-books were in their places. It was not duty so much as custom that shaped his growth and directed his ways. "What we Polgwins belong to do" had become a kind of creed in the family, and unconsciously but relentlessly he was enclosed within the straitened lines of this sense of what was fitting.

He was never a really popular man, except perhaps in his own village where the people were proud of their Squire in a fashion, and proud of all his ways. They were proud of his upright figure and wiry frame, and even of the unimpaired lustiness of his voice when he swore at them. Above all, they were proud of his three score years and five with never a day's sickness to his name. He belonged to them just as their accustomed surroundings and the old oak at Four Turnings belonged to them, and he was a part of their everyday life. Women and children did not approach him willingly, and no man ever struck an easy attitude in his presence or took a liberty with him more than once; but, on the whole, his contemporaries respected him well enough and admired him without any question of

a growing intimacy. For he rode hard and shot straight and if, in the course of his sixty odd years he had never learnt how to be civil to a woman, at any rate in all that time he had never let a man down or gone back on his word.

There was, however, one class of the human race among whom Squire Polgwin achieved a real and lasting popularity, and strangely enough that was among his schoolboy neighbours.

A few years hence half the fathers in the county, having reached the age when oft-told tales are better than any new ones, will lie back in their arm-chairs of an evening and tell their sons how Squire Polgwin taught them how to handle a gun. The best days in all the holidays were those spent shooting rabbits at Polgwin, and then later on snipe in the bogs, and then in due course came the proudest day of their lives when they were asked to the January pheasant shoot and posted at Woodcock corner, by the ten-acre covert. No man in the world, mark you, was more strict than the Squire about the way you held your gun and about unloading before you got over a hedge, but no one was more encouraging whether you missed or hit, and as for the lunches he provided they were unequalled: the hot pasties, the apple Johnnies and thick yellow cream, helping after helping till you simply had to hold your breath. He would treat every fourteen-year-old just as he treated his own

contemporaries and hand round the port to them as if they were grown men.

And so on, and so on, the new generation listening meanwhile in an attitude of growing impatience, aware that escape is out of the question until the bottle story is told once more. The young generation brightens at the mention of port, for the consummation seems to be at hand. But no; the old man is back again at his first woodcock, and that is no story for dismissal with a few bare phrases. The woodcock duly despatched and the Squire's approval retold for the fiftieth time, we get on to the bottle tale at last.

"Young Penhaligon it was—No, I'm wrong—young Meakins it must have been. Of course. Yes, it was Meakins—always rather a milksop, same as his father before him—taking up the decanter as if he'd never touched port before. I don't suppose he had. Anyway the Squire roared out suddenly, 'Meakins, my boy, don't you know the difference between a bottle and a woman? Remember it all your life or you'll never get on. Always take a bottle by the neck and a woman by the waist.' "

As for the Squire's own history where women were concerned, there were many rumours and few facts. Most people believed that he had been wild in his youth. Certainly as a boy one of his favourite amusements was to wait behind the wall that skirted the road, and bowl his hoop out suddenly to trip

up passing horses. A few years later the village folk would turn in their beds in the small hours of the morning and wonder whether they heard the headless horses, those midnight harbingers of misfortune to the Polgwin race, for there was often hard galloping on the road ; but when night after night the sounds were heard, and still no disaster fell upon the family, they turned over and slept again, well assured it was only the Squire coming home at break-neck speed from some prolonged carousal.

In the middle of the rhododendron coverts there was a pit known only to Billy Bosanko and a few choice spirits, the lowest roughs in the district. In this secluded spot cock-fighting was carried on until a very recent date, and to say that the Squire countenanced the sport is to say rather less than half the truth.

The physical toughness of the Squire was proved over and over again. There was the day of badger-digging at Halabezack when his thumb was bitten off. The badger snapped as he was holding the bag for Billy Bosanko to drop it in ; he tied on the thumb again and went on to Porkellis to dig for another animal, and folks do say that the grafted member is sound and powerful to this very day.

Then there was his shooting accident. Very few people remember that day, and those who do not know of it would never discover the glass eye : they

would merely think he had a slight cast which rather enhanced his forbidding expression. It was a ricochet shot off a tree and if the victim knew who fired the shot he kept his knowledge to himself. As soon as the news spread that the Squire had been shot in the eye, the whole household was thrown into confusion. All the women were running about, opening and shutting doors, or making wild suggestions of helpfulness. Old Mrs. Polgwin was mixing brandy and water in the dining-room. When the excitement had subsided a little, some one said, "Where's the Squire?" Nobody knew. He had been forgotten in the general flurry. At last they found him in his bedroom, quietly packing his bag to go to London.

He got there in time to save the other eye, and after a visit to his gun-maker and a few months' practice with another gun he shot as well as ever.

All these "goings-on" connected with sport were well attested, with many another wild and reckless deed, but when it came to the ladies people only shook their heads and said, using words of dark uncertain import to cover their ignorance, "Ah, he has been a sad dog in his day, but there was safety in numbers!"

What safety or what numbers had been the Squire's portion they could not possibly have told you. Indeed, he had kept that part of his life so well hidden that a few believed him to be a con-

firmed woman-hater as well as an encrusted bachelor. And it is likely that he would never have given the minority cause to change their belief, had it not been for an attack of rheumatism which necessitated drastic measures, in the form of a cure at Harrogate.

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No friendly eye, nor even a curious one followed that cure at Harrogate and nothing was known of his proceedings until his return some three weeks later, without announcement of any unusual home-coming.

When Henry shuffled into the library as the dinner-gong sounded, he found his brother standing on the hearth-rug looking down on a little bright-haired lady with plump hands, a young face and an old figure, and a half-childish expression in her blue eyes.

“My wife, Henry,” said the Squire, and without waiting for the two to shake hands he gave her his arm and led her into the dining-room.

Next day the family coach was ordered out ; the heavy wheels creaked and groaned, dust lay thick on the yellow panels. Side by side the Squire and his Honoria drove down the long oak avenue, through the village, into Tolvern and back again. That was the only public announcement of the marriage of Stephen Polgwin.

After a pause, full of the inevitable surmise and chatter, neighbours came to call on the little lady,

who received them all with open arms and voluble talk. They did not understand her and there was no one in the world who could answer their anxious question, "Who was she?" But the fact remained that, whatever her past had been, she was now Mrs. Polgwin of Polgwin; so they called and received her visits, though, for lack of the much-desired information, they never could quite feel that she was "one of us."

That summer the Squire emerged like a chrysalis from his shell. He emerged into the haunts where men and women mix; he appeared at the Pentewans' garden-party; more than once he accompanied his wife to lunch or dine with neighbours, and, if he did not cultivate small talk or relax his hard features, at any rate he suffered fools with something more like toleration than he had ever shown before.

Gradually the eight-days' wonder ceased to be a general topic. No fresh developments were expected and the thing had lost its novelty. "She's got him on a string." "He's eating out of her hand." So said those who were more emphatic than refined and more addicted to stock phrases than to searching for the truth. But they had never considered the question that Jeremiah asked, and indeed the leopard had not changed his spots.

The Squire's emergence into women's society was shortlived and, as the winter drew on, his round

of shooting, hunting and meetings at the Farmers' Union occupied all his days. Honoria was then thrown back on her own resources for amusement. All the safes were opened and the old Polgwin tankards shone again at her luncheon and dinner-parties. The Squire could hardly be called a genial host, but when he was at home he did all that was required of him : he carved the game with decision, he sat at the foot of the table and circulated the wine, and his countenance was no faded copy of the departed Polgwins who looked down on him from the walls. Every feature was accentuated, and in his eyes and nose and mouth you could read again all the characteristics of his ancestors.

During that autumn and winter the bride occupied herself with her new acquaintances and with the heirlooms in the old house. Every chest and cupboard was examined, and buried treasures came into the open with that fragile air of things long enclosed that seem as if the daylight were too heavy for them, as if they would crumble when you breathed upon them. Petticoats there were and shawls, and fancy waistcoats rich in colour and design, old silk and satin and brocade. She would drape herself in one after another and parade before the mirror with quick movements of her head, like a bird preening its feathers ; then she would put them all back again and move on to open the next dark coffer, and the next. But when she had

wearied of the treasures in the house, and had settled down, after the fitful heartiness of those first dinner-parties, to the desultory intercourse of the county folk, she found in her neighbours little to divert or satisfy.

She had led a wandering, cosmopolitan life, full of change and company, and this it would seem was what she needed most, faces and voices, always new and always talking. No silent fireside companion could satisfy her restless bird-like spirit. One wonders what she must have felt through those long winter evenings ; with Henry crouched over his old books, beard on his chest and his skin like a piece of faded parchment ; with Stephen asleep in his arm-chair if he were not sitting long over his wine or absorbed in Jorrocks or some agricultural journal. Sometimes she would play a game of backgammon with Henry, but his deliberate manner and the sight of his yellow hands like claws must have made the game a torture for her rather than a diversion.

By day she would wander round the garden and the woods ; down to the dark, square pond bordered with rhododendron bushes, overhung at the far end by twisted oaks that made fantastic shadows on the water, like yellow serpents writhing in the gloom ; or up the drive a mile and a half long, the drive that seemed to shut her out from all her fellow-creatures. When she came to the old

encampment and the oak grove round the ditch that was called the Druids' circle, she felt that all the ghosts of ancient times were stretching dim arms to her and drawing her away with icy breath. Then she would hurry back in the closing wintry afternoon to the house of grey stone, gloomy, prison-like, but at any rate protective and solid, standing there unmoved among the spirits of the past. One might as well have put a humming-bird in a cellar as shut Honoria into that house like a vault, alone with those two old brothers and all the faded treasures.

Then, about half-way through the winter, the officers at the Tolvern barracks gave a dance, and Stephen Polgwin appeared there with his Honoria dressed in pale-blue satin and all the family diamonds. The subalterns lost their heads completely and after that dance she never needed friends or diversion beyond her portion.

It is difficult to recapitulate in their true order the consequences, direct and indirect, of the Tolvern ball, but those who are always wise after the event have several tales to tell which throw some light on the subject.

They say that from the date of the ball onwards the gates of the lodge were always kept open, and that the road from the barracks to Polgwin was never empty. They say that the east wing of the old house was opened and the blinds drawn up for

the first time in twenty years ; the four-post beds were aired and the drawing-room was cleared of furniture. A band was engaged from Exeter and Honoria invited all her new friends to the dance ; but ever since that fateful day her friends were to be found neither among women nor among the county families, and that singular fact had set the ball of gossip rolling. Henceforward they relate their facts with circumstantial care, for every neighbour became an eager witness to the primrose path that Honoria's feet were treading.

It was not long after the opening of the east wing that one of the wise ones observed a curious little scene at the local station for Polgwin. The Squire was returning home one evening by the six o'clock train. There was only one conveyance outside Tredethy booking office. Two young men with Gladstone bags were inquiring in loud, clear tones if anything from Polgwin had come to meet them and the porter pointed to the Squire's four-wheeled dog-cart. Followed by the porter with the bags they walked towards the dog-cart as the owner was getting in. He stepped up, took the reins from his man, raised his hat just a quarter of an inch from his head and bowed.

"Mrs. Polgwin's friends, I presume," he said, with the strangest emphasis on the word "Mrs.," and he drove away.

The next authenticated fact that they relate

concerns Honoria's dinner-parties. After that little scene at Tredethy, her parties were given without a host. The Squire dined with his brother Henry in the smoking-room, and if Henry were away with his fellow-numismatologists the Squire dined alone.

The next scene, and the last one in which Honoria had a part to play, had no witness but the two brothers. Yet the wise ones are just as explicit and graphic as if they themselves had been standing on the hearth-rug. Stephen Polgwin came in late from hunting one evening to find an unstamped letter addressed to him. It lay on the marble table in the hall. It is to be presumed that he digested the contents of that letter while dressing for dinner. When Henry came into the library he found his brother standing upright, back to the fire, instead of stretched in an "after-hunting" attitude in his leather chair. His lower lip was stuck out farther than ever and the old Polgwins looked grimly down from their frames above the bookshelves.

"Honorias bolted," said the Squire, and the remark was more like a curse than an affirmation. "The b——h. That labbatt from Tolvern barracks—young Bradley. A woman's taste! Six foot of calves' flesh, that's what he is. And beef to the hocks."

And he went in to dinner. Nor was Honoria's

name ever mentioned again within those walls. That night as the brothers sat over the fire they heard the headless horses on the drive. Nearer and nearer came those galloping hoofs with a curious, hollow sound ; right down to the front door they came, halted for a moment, then hurried round the gravel sweep and up the drive again, growing fainter and fainter till they died away. Henry shivered and his head sank lower on his chest ; but there was silence between the brothers, for Stephen only stuck out his lower lip and gazed into the embers.

The years went by and there was no outward sign in the old house that a mistress had ever come and gone. The Squire was occupied in hunting and shooting as before, and still he was a regular attendant at the meetings of the Farmers' Union. His speech was, if anything, more terse and bitter, his under-lip more pendent and his curses in the hunting-field more forcible. He weathered, with more or less irritability, several attacks of rheumatism, but he never went to Harrogate for another cure.

Evening after evening the two old men sat alone in the library, and what they found to talk about, or if they ever talked at all, was known only to the Polgwin ancestors who looked down on them from the old frames with grim and questioning glance.

"My poor brother, Henry," Stephen always

said in speaking of him, and nothing more, as if he were some child or imbecile.

And indeed what was Henry's life but the life of a fool or a cripple in the eyes of such a man as the Squire? To sit among those musty books day after day, totally uninterested in horse or hound, ignorant of the difference between a turnip and a swede, or a Devon and a Hereford, hardly aware of seed-time and harvest: it was only half a life. There had been a time when Henry went shooting with rational men, more from a sense of tradition, it is true, than in pursuit of pleasure; but after the narrow escape of the faithful keeper, Gummo, he had never cared to touch a gun again. Gummo had been peppered in the legs, not once but twice, and he walked with a limp to his dying day, though the only comment he ever made on the incident was one remark as he lay in hospital:

"I wouldn't 'a minded if Maister 'Enry 'adn't guv me both barrels."

One by one all the outdoor interests of Henry's boyhood had faded, and gradually he had withdrawn himself from the world of men into the world of thought, till, to all intents and purposes, he was leading the life of a student monk in that old grey house.

As for Honoria, not one of the neighbours ever heard anything more of her. So much may be safely affirmed, for had any news ever come to

hand no one in the district would have been so unfeeling as to keep it to himself. There are misers of every kind in the county, misers of birth and breeding, misers of low degree, but no miser in any grade of life would have hoarded a rumour concerning the "goings-on" of Mrs. Stephen Polgwin. Her short career as the mistress of Polgwin had been like the passing of some butterfly across a shadowed space, and no more lasting impress of her presence remained than the impress left by a butterfly's wing on a wall.

Yet the wise ones, avowedly in pursuit of truth, but secretly in search of the rounded story dear to human heart, have one more tale to tell. It is the last tale of all in the life of Stephen Polgwin.

The hounds had met at Halabezack near the end of the season. They had found a fox in Tolvarrick, and "they li'l dawgs was goin' like fire," as Billy Bosanko remarked to a friend who was contesting the highest point of a hedge with him; while the fox could be seen in the distance, "goin' away down to Puffet like steam an' smoke, goin' like a li'l ball." The Squire, for all his three score years and ten, was leading the field when they came to Ebenezer's bottom and he was the first to take the big bank below the furze covert. Young Meakins following close behind, called out:

"What's it like the other side, Squire?" Stephen Polgwin, half turning his head, snapped

sideways, "I'll send you a post card next week," and disappeared.

As he took the bank there was heard a volley of fearful oaths—then silence. Those who knew the Squire and his ways knew that that particular volley was never wasted on any ordinary occasion. Riding over seeds had been known to provoke it, and persistent heading of the fox, but usually it was reserved for nothing less than barbed wire; and the man following next held up his hand to check the field.

Young Meakins flung himself off his horse and clambered up the hedge. The Squire was lying face downwards on the other side and his horse was galloping away over the grass. They turned him over and Meakins affirms that he looked up once and muttered, "Where's Honoria, damn her eyes?" and thereafter never spoke again. But that young man always loved to find a listener and always he judged their ideas of what was fitting by his own half-fledged notions of life; nor was he often disappointed. A few, however, among those who knew and valued the Squire, prefer to believe that he preserved to the end that grim silence which had always been so characteristic of the man.

They carried him home on a gate and laid him in the old four-poster with the red and yellow hangings of silk. There was nothing else to be done.

Late into the night Henry sat alone in the library. His book had fallen from his hand. Now he would look into the fire and now at his brother's empty chair, and the silence to which he was so well accustomed seemed weighty and unbearable that night. He felt a curious emptiness all round him and a curious weakness inside, as if some vital organ had been removed, or as if he had been bereft, without any warning, of all motive power, and left like a clock run down with no one at hand to wind him up again. He looked down and caught sight of his trousers, baggy at the knee, and remembered, with a start, that he had not changed for dinner.

What would Stephen say?

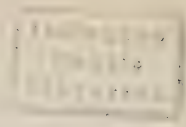
Long ago, just after the time when their father died, he remembered coming down one evening in his everyday clothes and Stephen had shut the dining-room door in his face; remarking, "Only artists and pigs don't change for dinner and I dine with neither."

And with that memory he suddenly realized that there was no Stephen to give any orders now; he himself must give the orders. The thought was overwhelming. It came down on him like an avalanche sweeping away accustomed landmarks. He who for so many years had never troubled at all about his surroundings, must turn and consider them now, must give orders for stable, farm and

garden, even for dinner and breakfast. Nothing would come naturally ; the days would bring a series of pin-pricks. His quiet world was to be invaded all at once by a crowd of clamorous, gibbering necessities that would absorb his time and energy and disturb his peace. And for what purpose ?

He stirred uneasily in his chair, as he sat there gazing into the fire and confronting his destiny with little enough of courage or goodwill for what lay before him ; “ poor Henry,” the last of the Polgwins. And once again he heard the headless horses ; nearer and nearer they came, galloping down the drive—and the sound was so hollow that it would have struck a chill to any heart—right up to the front door before they turned and galloped away into the distance.

He shivered, and all the old, forgotten Polgwins looked down silently, grimly on the last of their race.



CHAPTER XX

FOXGLOVES

IT was a very dim light and the June evening was nearly dead as we came up the hill from the sea. On our right was a deep little valley, where a stream trickled with nearly spent force through a green tangle. On the other side of the stream rose a slope, crowned with one granite boulder, indomitable, angular, brooding as with sinister intent over the most beautiful wild garden.

There was only one kind of flower in it, and in that dim light the colour was not very definite, but those forms were unforgettable.

The breezes sweeping up the little valley from the sea had bent them all slightly in one direction. There they grew, those leaning spires of spotted bells, unmoved and independent, but every one inclined as if to catch some whisper, every one animated by the same spirit. Dim and still they leant and listened there, while darkness gathered slowly round them.

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Next week we saw them again under the brilliant

light of our front lamps, as we motored at night. They were scattered over miles and miles of country. Here a solitary one would be leaning forward from a roadside bank. We flashed our light on to each one, spire after spire they appeared for a moment and were gone. They seemed, under that glaring light, so vividly individual as they stood out distinct and pointed from a confused blur of vegetation.

Suddenly we saw some dark points silhouetted against a starless sky ; no colour in the flowers, no colour in the clouds, both might have been black only that one was visible against the other. They were growing on the top of a hedge beyond the circle of our light with only the open country and sky behind them.

They clustered and soared like moving crowds ; rampant they nodded in every hedgerow. They were no longer the poisonous rather forbidding flowers of daylight. They were visualized spirits full of thought and character.

In those narrow lanes where the plants grew luxuriantly from either hedge, the foxgloves seemed more desirous of companionship than any other flowers, so nearly did they meet, tip to tip, as we rushed on between them brushing them apart.

They alone, in the mysterious night that was all round us, stood out dominant and unashamed. There was nothing shy about them. They were

almost articulate with the tremendous force of their silence.

What histories must have been observed by generations of foxgloves in those winding lanes !

The lanes are far from dusty highways, so wide and smooth for modern traffic, so hard and soulless before hurrying crowds. They are rough and twisting and very steep ; ruts and loose stones cover their surface ; round every corner is a new vista into a new gloom.

The spirit of the lanes hems us in, as with clinging green arms ; it would gladly tell us of all it has seen and learnt and suffered in these hundreds of years, of all the dramatic changes that were sudden and of all the glorious, progressive changes that were slow. It is longing to share with us all the histories of the silent fields beyond, all the life stories of the leisured travellers who have passed within its tangled greenery.

And we rush on, two-eyed, monstrous, bringing light where darkness was more beautiful, never heeding the call of the lane, brushing it aside as we brush aside so much that is insistent and true.

But the foxgloves with their nodding spires we cannot forget, nor lose a haunting sense of the great secret which they never articulated.

But were they, after all, articulate ? Was the failure on our side ? Were we deaf perhaps, or

unworthy of their message? It may be so. At any rate it was many a year before I learnt the language of the foxgloves and I found my way to the truth through more than one ill-founded suspicion.

They were rioting one summer all over a wild peninsula, if anything so stately ever could or would riot. At least they were in full possession of the country, gathered in serried mass and line on hedge-row, cliff and hill-side, in a profusion suggestive of riot. Proud of mien they were, aspiring, dominant, unfriendly; and I thought with gratitude of more humble, homely flowers.

Nothing tame or trained will satisfy their spirit. The immemorial boulders, a tangled brake of fern, a rough hill-side or the unbounded sea and sky, wherever nature is wild and waste, the foxgloves come to stay. Yet, even in this free choice of the wilderness, I suspected them of arrogance. Deeply hidden in the spotted bells, was there no consciousness of borrowing from their setting a beauty not their own? What indeed is the foxglove alone, or in a garden border? Stiff, unbending, a thing coarse-leaved and poisonous, rank and most impure in colour; always stately it is true, but with no endearing qualities. Not his the power to romp and smile, caress and twine, to curl himself into winning attitudes or to lend attentive ear, to hold familiar intercourse or to soothe and comfort in

homely fashion. He must ever stand above the masses and spend his days in proud and nodding isolation. Does he comfort himself in these wild solitudes where no small homely thing is near to remind him of his limitations? Does he seek the company of rock and hill and sea from a love of beauty, or from sheer vainglory?

And I, in my folly, condemned the foxglove for his pride. "Unrelenting," I murmured, "unchanging, formal. He has not even any moods or variations. He has a proud, metallic soul."

One evening, from a dell on the cliff, I saw the foxgloves above me. Against the horizon and the sea, every spire was outlined and every bell. They stood there like tiny spears raised against infinity and their pride had not forsaken them, for they were all rejoicing in their own perfection, faces turned away from the immense blue space that lent them all their beauty. Next day I saw them again in the foreground of the deep blue water in the bay, and in the light of that noonday sun they were almost scarlet. "More arrogant than ever," I thought, "but at any rate they have changed their colour."

And then there came a morning when criticism grew weak in the presence of something greater. I have only to close my eyes and that picture is vivid now.

I wind up the path to the headland, eyes fixed on a group against the sky. Not one in that crowd has been able to attain full height or breadth, but even in congestion they are proud, proud as ever, outlined in space. Coming down to the next hollow I meet them on level ground where they stand in conscious brilliance, outshining and overtopping every neighbour.

Below me is a waving green sea of bracken, with here and there a rosy-purple point. It is a wind-stirred hollow and even those stately forms dare not shrink from the touch of the lord of air and sea, but they sway pendulum-wise, keeping their own shape as if to assert their independence. Every spire of roseate bells will lean first one way and then another, as if fain to harmonize with the wind's music, and, in harmonizing, to prove themselves the leaders of the tune. But the fern is all a-quiver; the fern must answer every ripple and eddy of the wind like a sensitive plant, caring only to sway and whisper at command.

A sudden wave of feeling comes over me, of reverence, delight or wonder, call it what you will; but I could kneel and worship them here in the green fern, for there is something godlike in their mien, and their beauty leaves nothing to be desired. The word that never is and never can be spoken hovers here on the narrow border between eloquence and dumbness, hovers in those purple bells with

the emotion of "silence implying sound." It is a surcharged moment ; I can feel all the world as one silent throb. Borne on the crest of some mighty wave, resting on the intake of a deep-drawn breath, I wait for them to speak ; but no sound comes, no song, no winged word of eternal import. The wave rolls on without breaking, the breath comes to an end and I awake as from a dream.

From that day I knew that I had misjudged the foxgloves, but I was afraid of what they had to tell.

Among their bells some burning secret seemed to hover on the verge of expression, and I feared the moment when they would pass it on. I had always known that many flowers are gifted with speech. They whisper and flutter among themselves, they nod and beckon and confide with their painted faces, and perhaps the pansy, in deep humility looks up to man with a spoken message ; but usually flowers are content to share their talk with their own kind, and if ever we do intercept a word or two it is only on the wing, when we have forgotten the burden of ourselves, when we have stooped and listened low and laid our ear to elfin harmonies in a world unknown. But now I knew that the foxgloves, ambitious, dominant, aloof and almost repellent as they seemed to be, were always on the verge of speech.

Nor was their talk the idle chiming of one bell in another's ear ; it was some grandiose message to the human race, some flower-music blended of god-like meaning and mortal emotion. Clothed in imperial purple, they speak as from a height, in clarion tones, with pride in themselves and their purpose in every gesture, and yet, behind the pride, a faint resonant note of human tears.

And now, as I watched the foxgloves with burning admiration, a softer feeling mingled with that awe. I noted many a subtle change in growth and form and colour ; a closer intimacy only heightened their beauty. One evening I found them completely off their guard. They were growing on a little plateau of stony soil overlooking the creek where the fishermen beach their boats ; the long rays of the setting sun fell on the group, lending buds and leaves a misty aura, as if their cells were exuding silver light. Every coloured bell was drinking in the light, each was like some transparent shell. No longer were they proud, one-faced and angular : the bells clustered all round the stems, they grew more loosely too on every side, and all the plants had a huddled, sociable air, as if about to seek comfort in each other's presence. They were more homely than any foxgloves I had ever seen ; they seemed to be relaxed a little from the day's erectness, in full, familiar conclave, singing evensong.

By this time I knew that the foxgloves' message was concerned with the sweet and burning beauty of the world, a beauty hardly to be borne by those who understand. Nearer than that I will not, dare not utter their secret ; but I knew enough to acquit them of mere vainglorious pride, knew the poignant burden and the wellnigh unutterable message that was theirs ; knew why they stood erect, unbending before the world, and why sometimes a quiver would run through their purple bells, why they clothed their souls in a mask of arrogance, yet failed not to deliver their Master's message to any who would hear. I had learnt to listen for their voice, but always as one who comes with humility and thirst, and always I went to them ; they never came to me.

Then one evening we two wandered down towards the sea. We went across the fields and hedges ; suddenly, looking over a hedge, we saw them on a downward slope against the blue. They were in full chorus, shouting out all their secrets in those last moments of daylight when emotion reaches a climax, only to die down with the setting sun. Every one was shouting aloud ; it was a Hallelujah chorus and a *De Profundis* with many another melody, all the notes and motives were harmonious yet distinct.

I turned and ran, fearful of that betrayal, but my companion's face was unaware, and then I

remembered that the foxgloves' music can only sound in the ear of one who has lived through doubt and scorn, of one who has learnt humility through pride, and has come at last to worship before their bells.

The language of the foxgloves has no meaning for the eloquent, the innocent or the passer-by.

And thank God that it is so.

CHAPTER XXI

AUNT JULIET

I CANNOT tell you the life-story of Aunt Juliet from beginning to end, nor, to speak the truth, was she any aunt of mine. All the same she has played a larger part in my life than all the god-parents, uncles, aunts and other blood-relations who overshadow childhood.

Her real name does not matter, for she was always Aunt Juliet to her intimates, and as for those who were not her intimates—well, I do not believe there were any such people, except the ones who never saw her. For every one who knew her loved her with a peculiarly possessive love that held in it something of intimacy, from their point of view at any rate. It was not that she gave herself away easily as we say ; on the contrary she had much of the Victorian reserve, but they felt that she was their Aunt Juliet in some individual fashion, however slight the intercourse had been.

She was nothing at all to look at. Angular figure and colourless face with no one feature that you could remember, but a voice that you heard

long after it had finished speaking ; and that you will be able to hear all your days whenever you like to be alone and to call her to your memory. Old-fashioned of course ; I rather think she wore elastic-sided boots, and there were bonnet and strings and a tight bodice with beautiful lace at wrist and neck.

She had a keen, all-round intelligence and a retentive memory, but she was not brilliantly clever in any one subject more than another, and when she talked it was always about your pursuits and interests, not her own. Her talk was more full of suggestion than statement and yet you never came away from her without a curiously full, contented feeling as if you had indulged in a mental feast. I do not think she slipped her information in sideways or even drew yours out of you by question and interest, but you were somehow aware of her rich mental background, so that whatever you discussed was correlated with everything else that mattered in the world.

And the things that mattered with Aunt Juliet are little thought of now. Some of them have even been altogether pushed out of sight. Manners mattered very much and leisure still more. Leisure, you see, was the soil in which all the other things grew : kindness, thoroughness, proportion, breadth. But manners and leisure were always linked together in her mind, I feel certain. There was about her

politeness an indescribable something that came of being very deliberate.

I am sure she would not have approved of motor-cars and telephones, of flying-machines and vacuum-cleaners. She would have resisted them to the last moment and after. She would have known instinctively that the speeding up of life must take the fine bloom off that mellow politeness which can only ripen slowly. It is good to remember that she was never called upon to face those things.

I thought of her the other day after I had sent this post card to my friend : " Sorry can't get over to-morrow. Try next week."

And I suddenly remembered a little note I had once seen in Aunt Juliet's handwriting. It was written to a neighbour who had been prevented calling on her and had, no doubt, informed her of the fact in terms less curt than mine. " My dear Mrs. Letcher," her letter ran, " I am so truly sorry that you are not able to give me the pleasure of seeing you here to-day. I can but hope that your coming is, for me, a pleasure deferred."

There may be merit in each epistolary style, but you cannot deny that hers is the better English.

I think, in regard to activity, that " how " meant much more to her than " what." I do not suppose that Aunt Juliet did much picking and choosing about her daily occupations, but I know that she was choice and particular in the way that she

performed them. I know that the vase of flowers was carefully wiped before it was placed on the mat, and that the stems were cut every day ; that the silver penknife was always used to open her letters and that scraps of paper were never thrown on the floor ; that each letter was replaced in its envelope, was duly answered and then tied up by pink tape with others in the same hand. I know that records were duly kept, not merely reference diaries and accurate accounts, but living mental records of the little and big things that happened day by day and year after year. I know that life's lessons were not lost in any eager chase after new experience, but were stored and garnered so that her past grew ever richer and more full of meaning. I know that conclusions were not hastily reached, nor sudden decisions taken. There were never any week-end journeys or unreflecting movements to disturb the continuity of her life.

You will be very likely to urge that her days were dull and peaceful, but I can tell you that her life was truly rich. She travelled with her mind, her interests were wide as the world and every interest meant many friends.

You must not think from what I have said that Aunt Juliet was slow. Slow to change, by preference and habit, she may have been, but slow in the uptake she never was. Nor would she have understood that expression had you used it. When

need arose, nobody could make a more swift and sharp decision. All her mental training and her regular habits served her in good stead at such times, for she knew without going back on her traces, without having to reflect on principle or to study consistency, what were the things that counted and what did not. And truth came easily first, as you will see by the following story.

She was walking one day up a side street in Tolvern with a basket on her arm, when a half-drunken sailor accosted her with the strange announcement that he begged her pardon but he had taken an oath to kiss the first woman that he met and here she was. One glance at the man ; only one flicker of hesitation ; she looked up the street and down the street. Not a soul was in sight. " Be quick then," she said and presented her cheek. Then she walked on, head erect.

As for what she would have done had the road been full instead of empty, I do not much care to know, but I like to picture her looking quickly up the street and down the street ; it is a pretty human touch that makes one almost feel she is still among us.

Many clever men and women of that generation enjoyed her society and she had quite a little coterie of scientists and literary folk among her friends, but those who loved her most were quite simple people, and, strangely enough, they had no suspicion

that she was clever. They always looked upon her as one of themselves, as one with a curious faculty for understanding the thoughts they could not quite express.

Her welcome always warmed you through and through. I can see her now, standing in her doorway at the top of the rounded steps to greet a guest. She would give you both her hands and look you in the face and say some quite ordinary words of welcome in a tone that made you realize you had never understood their meaning, and those words would never seem ordinary again. Indeed, her home and garden were full of welcome. I cannot tell you how it was, she had somehow filled them with her spirit. You have known so many houses with an unlived in, overtidy appearance, and others always in a litter reflecting their daily employments; and in either case you always suffer on arrival a momentary feeling of being an intruder there, of coming in from outside. But to enter Aunt Juliet's house was to feel as if you were coming home: everything had a receptive look as if it were merely waiting for your presence, from the open doors to the arm-chairs and the flowers in the border. It was as if she had impressed her personality on every object round her and had trained all her belongings to live with welcome writ large on their inanimate faces.

If you called and found her away it was just the

same. The old manservant with black beard and a russet face had adopted something of her own gracious manner, and all the house and furniture seemed to be saying : " Come in, do please come in, so very glad to see you," while the garden also was calling in clear tones, " Come out and enjoy my scent and colour, I am waiting for you."

There was an effortless sincerity about everything that she did or said. It must have been that which gave such meaning to all her words and such value to her life.

Whenever I think of Aunt Juliet, I think also of flowers. Her garden did not seem to have been made, it was like a wild garden where cultivated treasures broke the bounds and ranged at will. She had planted hundreds and hundreds of snow-drops in the grass, and under the old ilex on the path that led to the sea were the little cyclamen of Italy. She never sought rarity or cared to cultivate tender plants ; profusion was the note of her garden, and after profusion, scent. Masses of lavender and rosemary, stocks and gilly-flowers, roses and mignonette, all the old-fashioned homely flowers came following on each other month after month. Many a happy hour she spent tying up new shoots and cutting off dead heads ; I can see her now snipping at the roses with her nippers as she took her friends all round the border, or picking with lavish hand a bunch to speed the parting guest.

Nothing was neglected in the garden, but nothing ever looked trim or trained, the plants were allowed to ramp and the paths were green with moss.

Nor did she confine her cultural activities to her own few acres. All the country was her garden and tokens of her work there are still among us. One wall in particular, where the red valerian grows, is known to this day as "Aunt Juliet's Wall." Whenever she set out for a drive, intent on call or business, in that old-fashioned low pony-chaise driven by her manservant with black gloves and a square black beard, she would scatter seeds on her way. Sometimes she would get out and press them into the crevice of a wall or bury them in some moist hedge loam; and to those who remember her haunts and habits all the district bears living witness to her love of flowers.

She never wrote a book, though her correspondence shows what might have been. Her command of English was singularly happy and she was one of those people who cannot write a dull letter, be the pages never so few or many. The very weather became a topic of interest in her hands, and as for her comments on men and things, they were always couched in felicitous terms, reflecting an attitude where thought and feeling were not at variance.

You must not think because my Aunt Juliet was what they call a strong character that she had a marked inclination to any point of the mental

or emotional compass. All her strength was expended in standing four-square to the winds of heaven, in maintaining an attitude of poise, but her balance was the balance of health not of indifference. She could stand erect because she saw all round her, and because she realized that the present is not all, she would never take cover from the prevailing wind, but faced it out just as she faced everything over which she had no control.

More than once I have been asked what she did. Hers is a well-known name and, now that she has gone, people look for some outward and visible token that she lived and died. I cannot point to any, except the flowers. You must leave the world of pen and ink, of brick and stone if you want to find Aunt Juliet's mausoleum. I cannot tell you what she did.

And, if you ask me what she was and what she is, I can only tell you this. I never knew her, never saw her, never even heard her speak, for, since Aunt Juliet died, a whole generation has come and gone. But she was the friend of my friend, and her memory, like an evergreen, lives in my heart also.

CHAPTER XXII

COUSINS

SHE stood on the first-class deck of the s.s. *Orinoco*, a little apart from her family, and the vessel drew slowly in towards the wharf. Now the faces in the waiting crowd began to stand out, one distinct from another, and the waving of handkerchiefs became more furious. A bald-headed man in a brown suit, after scanning every deck in turn, with his hand over his eyes, had recognized his friends. He stood in front of the crowd and waved his hat above his head, moving his arms up and down like a pump-handle.

On the upper deck there was a restless atmosphere. No one could keep still, and the long line of people with elbows on rail and heads leaning over the water broke up every now and then as some one moved to find a more prominent place.

Now the handkerchiefs waved continuously, as if worked by machinery, and the shouts of greeting became audible words, and from ship to shore and shore to ship was a cross-current of query and reply.

"How's Father?"

"Had a splendid trip out."

"How's Father?"

"Splendid trip."

"All well at home?"

"Very fit."

"How's Father?"

"First rate."

"How are you?"

"No chance of getting ashore for half an hour."

Still she stood there, quite alone, gazing into space, shrinking into a corner of the deck as far away from the rail as possible, averting her eyes from the spot where her family were exchanging greetings with a little group below. One glance at that little group on the wharf had fulfilled her worst fears, and now she looked regretfully backwards, down the river, past the olive-green mangrove swamps to the dreary expanse of sea behind the *Orinoco*. She longed to retrace her six-weeks' course over that watery way. At this moment every single day of the long sea-journey seemed like a bright dream gone beyond recall. Her glance travelled down again to the wharf as if impelled by some magnetic force. She could not help herself, she must look at them one by one.

A stout, high-bosomed woman in putty colour, whose figure shook with the undulations of a jelly as she walked. Another woman in grey, tightly

dressed, not so stout, but with the same tableland in front ; and about the clothes of both a self-conscious aspect, as if the garments were saying : " Yes, we are well-buttoned up, closely fitting and carefully put on. We do not wish to be artistic, but every soul can see that we are neat and shaped to the figure." Between these two a man in a straw hat and long-toed yellow boots, a grey suit and eye-glasses ; there was only one possible epithet for him. He was a " rank outsider."

And these tightly buttoned women were her aunts, while the boulder would, no doubt, claim cousinship.

She grasped her attaché-case more firmly in her hand ; it was filled with the plays of Synge and Alice Meynell's poems. She bit her lip as she thought of her English school and her English friends ; of the convent in Paris and then that year abroad with her mother and sisters, that kaleidoscopic year of music, theatres and Art Galleries, of foreign *pensions* where vivacious Russian and Polish exiles shared their daily interests and their daily bread ; above all of home, of the little Cornish valley by the sea. The blue of the Mediterranean itself was not deeper than the blue water in that little bay and there was something intimate and protecting about the granite boulders and granite fences everywhere. In this tropical glare she yearned for those quiet days of moisture,

days of something more than mist and less than rain, when all the world was grey and restful.

Why had her mother left their financial interests behind when she came home thirteen years ago, to educate her fatherless children in England? Why had her energetic sister taken a fancy to go "back to the land" and to cultivate an orchard in the Colonies? Why had the child, Polly, been born subject to asthma, so that the doctors recommended two years in a hot climate? Why had everything conspired to send them all out to this benighted continent? Why? Why? Why?

Now she stood there, confronted with this strange relative in the straw hat and eye-glasses, and troublesome thoughts rose up within her. Had she, perhaps, been too exclusive, rather too sweeping in her judgments of men? Those dark-eyed foreigners had set so high a standard that the ordinary mortal was insufferably ordinary now. She had never danced in those long weeks at sea, because, among all the army and navy men, all the leisured travelers and commercial magnates, there was hardly anyone good enough to dance with. As the yellow boots caught her eye once more she shrank in her own estimation. She tried to recall her socialistic theories, tried to persuade herself that they were rooted principles. All men were her brothers; and every woman her sister. Long ago that doctrine had roused in her a responsive thrill; for many a

year she had drawn mental nourishment from that creed. Now came a horrible suspicion. Was it all a dead letter, and had it never touched her life? Why should her most cherished belief dissolve at the sight of a pair of yellow boots?

Well, things must be faced; and she looked forward. What agony awaited her in this unfamiliar land? What long-drawn-out starvation for all the finer elements of one's nature? What hideous echoes from that nasal twang? Would she ever again hear any other sound?

She shivered as she stood there under the tropical sun, in her very short check skirt, her white silk stockings and jumper, black velvet shoes and gauze-covered Parisian hat. An utter loneliness of spirit came over her. These Colonials were all materialists, they must be all materialists, she could judge them by her fellow-passengers, and every one had a cockney voice; the heat was like a vampire, the country was repellent, the prospects were unspeakable. The gum-trees were ragged, their very foliage was grey instead of green, the coast-line was barren and uninviting, there was no subtlety in the landscape, no imagination in the people.

Yet Heaven must be praised for one mercy. Her uncle and aunt from Tooloomboolloo were not coming down to meet them. Though, after all, would it not have been easier to drink the cup of

bitterness at one gulp? For a moment she felt like crying out to her fellow-passengers:

“ My uncle and aunt live in Tooloomboolloo and they keep a public-house.”

No ; she would not call it an hotel. As she stood there, destitute in spirit, she would strip the last remnant of veneer from things and call them openly by their true names.

The smell wafted from the entrance to the Tooloomboolloo bar was already in her fastidious nostrils, when she heard a more strident cockney accent than any that had hitherto met her ears. The *Orinoco* was alongside the wharf now, the gangways were down and all the decks were full of strangers. Her little sister Polly was coming towards her, hanging on the arm of a grey flannel suit. She could only look down with involuntary shrinking from that encounter, and once more her eyes met a pair of yellow, long-toed boots. She braced herself for a greeting. A hand was shot forth and hers was held in a grasp of iron.

“ Pleased to meet you. And how do you like Australia ? ”

The high-bosomed ones came behind.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHERE QUAKERS REST

I CAN see it all now as I first saw it one spring morning, coming suddenly on it, as on an exquisite miniature of an other-worldish land.

The old Quaker Meeting-House at the bottom of the valley ; golden catkins hanging over a stream and tangled undergrowth along the water ; an orchard close by and primroses in the hedge ; deep peace, and silence except for that gentle trickle. The stream finds the sea only a mile lower down, but there is no view of the sea and no hint of the outside world as you stand in that hidden cemetery.

The simple Meeting-House nearly three hundred years old, with thatched roof and whitewashed walls and lattice windows, standing in its little graveyard full of green mounds with no symmetry or plan, mysterious green mounds without any headstone.

The eloquent hush inside the building, the wooden gallery above the entrance, the Elders' seat against the opposite wall, plain deal benches, plain white walls ; the eye seeks ornament and colour, but turns at last with satisfaction to the diamond-

paned windows, for they have a rich effect in all that simplicity.

The last resting place of the Friends is far from everyday life. You might be on the open sea for any sound that reaches you. There is no movement but the unchanging trickle of the stream. One farm and two cottages are nestled there, and the sun pours down as into a reservoir. When I went to get the key from Mrs. Triggs, I saw a brick-red *pyrus japonica* on her wall and the sun came streaming in at her cottage door. I found the old lady sitting in a high-backed chair by the kitchen fire. There was a *daphne* in a pot on the windowsill, several books in a shelf on the wall, and a saucer of milk on the floor in a corner. Mrs. Triggs had the bluest eyes with a kind, penetrating look, and white hair that grew in a wave. It was a beautiful old face, yet shrewd, and her talk was full of humour and cheerful observations.

What a pleasant life ! The interest of stray visitors coming for the key and asking questions about the old building ; her sense of proprietorship in it ; there are worse occupations than being caretaker of such a haunt of ancient peace. What a setting for old age too ! The sunshine, the beauty, and the security of that hidden valley ; and the colour of the *pyrus* on the wall.

That was one side of the picture ; the first side.

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Mrs. Triggs is now no longer just a picturesque figure in the perfect setting of that lonely valley. She has become an old friend. Some of her history I have learnt from herself, and some from observation, and some from the neighbours.

Tucked away on either side of her, as she sits in that high chair, are the crutches without which she cannot move. She has not been able to stoop for many years now, but in the morning she pulls on her stockings with the tongs, and in the evening she pushes them off with the poker. Her cottage is dilapidated, her staircase unsound, and her landlord is impoverished. Coltsfoot has taken complete possession of her garden, for her only son, a weakling addicted to hymns and rhymed literature, is not strong enough to grapple with it.

Of course she has not set foot outside the valley for years, but she reads, and, in her own fashion, keeps herself informed of the events of the outside world, passing judgment on them with the freshness of an uneducated mind. But let her give her reminiscences in her own words; reminiscences fragmentary and disconnected, but more vivid than any life-story a friend could write.

"I says to William John, I says, I be a proper oal cripple, an I o't ter be putt away up ter Church Town, but there, I mustn't grumble, there's a plenty a worse off. . . . I went in service up ter Penalewy farm on the Monday, an I was twelve year

old on the Wednesday. Of course I went ter work afore that, toppin turnips, an mindin chil'ren, an such like. Up ter Penalewy? Why, I 'ad a shillun a week; all sorts o' work, indoors an milking an all. I stopped there year an six months, an then I went to Mrs. Enstice over ter Tin-Pit, an I 'ad four pound a year an I thought I'd got a bra'e fine job then. . . . Schoolin? Why I never 'ad no schoolin 'cept the Sunday School. They learned me to read there, an I always says, ' Bless the Sunday School.' Never 'ad no time to learn a traade, me dearr; the voace-putt traade was the only one ever I was putt to. When I went away in service up ter Trelispick, I 'ad ter get some one ter write 'ome for me, an I said I wasn't goin ter be beholden ter no person, so I bo't a copy-book in ter Penpol, an I made a rule ter draw out one line o' they letters when I was goin ter bed, tired an all, 'twas all the same, an so I learned meself ter write. . . . The scrumatics? I bin like this for years, me dearr, I never 'ad no time for to rest when I was young, an I be paying for ut now. Why, when I was rearin a fam'ly, I've reared three an buried seven, why I 'adn't got no person ter come an do for me, so I 'ad ter get up an wash the baby, an lie down a bra'e while, an then get up an putt on the clothes an lie down agen."

Her estimate of men and things was generally

near the mark, though she was prone to exaggerate the virtues of her own generation and the prosperity of the present one, as people usually are when they have passed the age of sixty. The current wages of domestic servants denoted riches to her.

“If I’d a ’ad forty pound a year. My crums! Why, I did men’s work an all when I was young, an they only guv me twopence a day extra when I did the whitewashing. Young folks ain’t so tough nowadays I reckon.”

She summed up character pretty shrewdly, with an unfailing instinct for what was trustworthy and real. Though a professed Wesleyan, she had been penetrated by the reality of Quakerism, for she had many friends among the Friends who visited the little Meeting-House. In her more active days she had attended their meetings, like the rest of her dissenting neighbours, from a mixture of curiosity and of pride in what had become quite a local institution.

“Last time I was in ter Meeting there was a lot o’ white, hoary-headed oal gents in there up ter the Rostrum, an ’twas silent as the grave, an I felt as if I’d bin there a week, an we was all coughin an fidgettin like chil’ren, an I never could make up when ’twas all over, only then I saw them turn round an shake ’ands, an when we passed out they stood by the door an said as how they

was very glad ter see us there. But what they'm saying in ter Quaker Meeting, they'm saying from their heart. They be good all through. You feels as if you could depend on them like. The chap wot comes ter teel my garden said ter me, 'They'd get a bra'e lot more people ter come if they 'ad a bit 'o singin in there.' But o' course they couldn't do that. 'Tedden their religion. Some folks do like the singin an some do like the prayin. Tes all accordin. I heerd tell as how Kezia Skewes up ter Four Turnings was took rejoicin las' Sunday night in ter chapel. Ever since Mr. Dan'l Chellew come there they do say he's a gran' praicher, an he's got religion full an plenty, an they do come in scores ter hear 'un, an most every one is converted now. Ceptin oal Josiah Trounce. Las' Toosday 'e cum by with the fish, and I says to un, I says, 'Well, Mr. Trounce, be you converted too?' An 'e says ter me, 'Aw, my dearr soul, I shannt get converted. 'Ow could I tell any more lies about th'oal fish?' But there, as I says, us cannt make all folks just alike. I reckon it'll be all the same some day." . . .

Last time I greeted my old friend with inquiries about her rheumatism, she said :

"Well, me dearr, I do think they've a-got hold of me. They seem to 'ave settled in me joints like. I bin in some fooch all the week, spring-cleanin the other room, an 'twas so much as ever

I could do ter get around. William John, 'e done the planchin for me, but there, the menfolk cannt do things fitty like us can. I must get out in the yard when tes warmer, an set a bit an read the flowers an the grass. I'm in me seventy-eight now an I do think the scrumatics 'ave come to stay."

And then, with a bright smile, the conclusion of the whole matter :

" But I do push aroun an do the best I can."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE SMALLNESS OF MRS. ENGEW

THE question of the magnitude of Mrs. Engew must remain unresolved, notwithstanding that final pronouncement made during the battle of the Hymn-books by Miss Carkeek. The character of Mrs. Engew cannot be registered in the great book of accepted judgments where black and white in glaring opposition confront each other through the ages. It is more than possible that the colour of her spirit was neither black nor white, but grey. At any rate the smallness of Mrs. Engew will never go down to posterity in company with the boldness of Charles, with the unreadiness of Ethelred, or the greatness of Alexander.

Was she, when all is said and considered, small? Or did she, in spite of Miss Carkeek's uncompromising verdict, show some elements of greatness in her nature? That is for you to decide. We who knew her in her weakness and in her strength can only relate the facts as they occurred.

And first, if you are to take a wide view of the question, you must hear of an episode connected

with the public life of Mrs. Engew, an episode that took place some three years before the battle of the books. On that occasion it was recognized by one and all that she alone "stepped into the breach"; that she alone "averted a crisis"; that she, to put it briefly, "saved the situation" for the whole village. These three dramatic similes cover a deed of quite unusual selflessness.

It was just touch and go whether they could or could not found a village club in Tolskithy. "They," of course, were the organizers who roam over the county, penning ill-assorted units into groups, infusing lethargy with purpose. A dozen people were ready to shoulder the honour of being President, but not one would accept the more humble and arduous post of Secretary. Mrs. Engew's name had been first on the list of the dozen, so that she was not pushing herself forward, on the contrary she was climbing down when she said:

"You have kindly proposed me as President, but as there is no Secretary forthcoming, and we cannot start without one, I will take on the secretaryship if you like to elect some one else as your President."

The organizers, experienced as they were, and almost proof against emotion, sat dumb for a moment, overcome by the magnitude of the sacrifice. The proposal was accepted, and the new Secretary entered on her career with no sign of

regret for the honour that she had declined. There can be little doubt, looking back on Mrs. Engew's life with an historic glance, that this was the occasion when she rose to her full moral height.

Perhaps Miss Carkeek had not been a witness of that incomparable renunciation, or perhaps she was one of those who build their judgments on the narrow here and now, balancing vast conclusions on fragmentary evidence. At all events, in the matter of the celebrated battle, she did not look before and after, her judgment admitted no extenuating circumstance, it was direct, final, snappy :

“Mrs. Engew is small. That's what she is.”

As for the battle, it all came of that unfortunate desire long cherished by the Reverend Epaphroditus Webber, the desire to keep up with the times. The Reverend Paphy, as he was called in everyday life, may have been invested with the face and figure of a mediæval monk, but his mind ran in no cloistered groove of his own or anybody else's making. It was not the face and figure of an ascetic with which nature had clothed the Reverend Paphy's soul, rather he resembled one of those hopeful, corpulent monks in the picture of the fish-ponds. He had acquired somehow in his training the rather unclerical gift of laughter, developing it to such good effect that he was often able to laugh at himself. Not that he was a buffoon or frivolous person, but his own shadow never blocked the

light as he went happily through life, and whenever he set out to clear his path for progress he did it with a smile and not a frown.

It was, of course, his own idea to introduce the new hymn-books into Tolskithy Church, but the matter had to be duly discussed and approved by the Church Council. The debate that took place there has little bearing on the events that followed. It was an eloquent discussion, not without its humour and its bitterness, but in the end the parson had his following and a majority voted for the innovation. Then Mrs. Engew, the leader of the minority, stood up and said :

“ I shall not be there to use them.”

She said a good deal more as well, about the old hymns being good enough for her, about these newfangled High Church notions, about somebody making a stand for the things that matter, about change being the work of the devil, and up-to-date ideas the children of the devil, and so on, and so on, crescendo fashion, till she ended on the original note reiterated with twice the original emphasis :

“ I shall not be there to use them.”

It was a remarkable speech for a parish meeting and belied for ever that assembly's reputation for dullness.

As the people dispersed, somebody took her by the arm and said :

“ There, there, Mrs. Engew, you'll think better

of it come Sunday morning, church-time. Don't take on so. The old hymns are in the book too."

"I shall not," said the conservative lady. And she walked home with her head erect.

When Sunday came the new books had not arrived, so that Mrs. Engew was able to go to church and worship her Maker as if nothing had happened. It was the first Sunday in the month, when the vicar always preached from the altar-steps before celebrating Choral Communion. It happened that Mr. Engew, who was growing deaf, had recently complained that he could not hear the sermon when it was delivered from the altar-steps, and the fowls of the air, or the gossips of the village, had carried his complaint to the Vicarage. So it fell out that on this particular Sunday morning the vicar inaugurated a new custom: he preached the sermon from the chancel steps, thus advancing at least four yards nearer to Mr. and Mrs. Engew.

After this service there was a lull in the battle, one of those pauses that help to form a rhythm. Mrs. Engew announced, not a change of front nor a new intention, but an unexpected softening of purpose.

"Mr. Webber has obliged us," she declared, "and I shall go to church as usual next Sunday to oblige him."

True to her word she set out a week later, on her husband's arm, set out to pray and sing in

public as before, little guessing that it was for the last time.

All went well at first. The service opened with "Blessed are the pure in heart," and much as Mrs. Engew disliked the new number she remained quite cool when she found that words and tune were unchanged. After the sermon the vicar gave out "When I survey the wondrous cross." She swallowed hard as she heard number 107 instead of 108, glanced at the strange green cover as if it had been some articulate blasphemy, and found the place. She sang the first verse cheerfully, however, and the second and third with some mis-giving. Then the blow fell.

Was it mere habit, or was it the influence of the sacred building that bade her stifle her feelings till the service was ended? Not a sign of emotion escaped her: like an automaton she closed the book; like a carven image she received the Blessing; then she walked down the aisle with studied calmness, and through the churchyard and past the village pump. There the storm burst, and as it burst all the neighbours, instead of running for shelter, gathered round her.

"I've taught in the Sunday School twenty years," she said, and there was a sob in her voice as she spoke. "Sunday after Sunday I have taught those hymns. There is nothing like them, they are the foundation of everything. Of everything that I

believe. I learnt them in my cradle. And who is he, the little self-appointed critic, to bring among us these newfangled, jingling verses, to cut and disfigure our oldest friends, to introduce mere trash and doggerel and to force it down our throats? I controlled my feelings for the sake of peace. I bit my tongue. I stifled them, I kept them under. I said, 'I'll swim with the majority, I'll march with the rank and file, I'll stoop to the common point of view rather than stir up strife.' But never, never, never, will I sink with any majority to such a depth as that. Mutilation, unprovoked and unconsidered, I call it. To my mind it is desecration and nothing less. Where is his bump of reverence, his veneration for the past? Has he no concern for sacred things but will he lay destroying hands on all that is best in our service, and cut and hack and twist the words to his own misdirected fancy? He to call himself a faithful parson! He has betrayed his sacred trust. He has dared to move the landmarks of our childhood, the landmarks of our faith. Not one of you are able to deny it. Oh, my dear old Isaac Watts! It is enough to make him turn in his grave. That was the last straw."

With this colloquialism her eloquence expired and she turned away, while the neighbours looked after her, longing for more but fearing to follow. One more curious than the rest, or if not more curious then assuredly more bold, hurrying after

Mr. and Mrs. Engew, attached herself to them.

“What about Isaac Watts,” she ventured, “have they cut him out?”

“Didn’t you notice? Didn’t you hear? Didn’t you see?” shrieked Mrs. Engew. “I’ve taught those hymns twenty-five years and more and I know them every one by heart, and at my time of life I cannot, will not change. I would have borne anything in reason for the sake of peace, but when I came to that verse ‘Were the whole realm of nature mine,’ oh, I could hardly believe my ears! They have changed ‘offering’ to ‘present.’ Can you believe it? I didn’t think such a thing possible.”

And she pressed her husband’s arm more firmly, walking on towards their gate.

Of course this open-air harangue lost nothing in the telling, and gradually her remarks on the passing of the old hymn-books became worthy to rank with the funeral orations of Bossuet. Nor were they only related once or twice, or merely here and there. They were to be heard on every tongue, they enlivened every tea-party, they re-echoed at every street-corner. Again and again the discourse was repeated, till Mrs. Engew was generally credited with the eloquence of Demosthenes. It was after listening to the third version of the story at the weekly sewing-party, that Miss Carkeek gave forth her celebrated judgment :

“ Mrs. Engew is small. That’s what she is.”

And she paused, with her needle and thread in the air, while her words sank in. It is not possible to describe her tone. To begin with, in the single word “ small ” there was such a wealth of local inflection that you felt and heard the whole county backing up the adjective ; while, as for the pharisaic scorn and indignation, it was truly wonderful how much the monosyllable could carry. It was as if the speaker relegated the other to the ranks of those beneath contempt, while she herself, raised up by that little word, looked down on those ranks with Rhadamanthine severity.

Of course, after the memorable scene at the pump, all Tolskithy waited breathless, and the actual introduction of the new hymn-books could claim little interest while Mrs. Engew’s attitude towards them claimed so much.

Would she leave the church ? Would the Reverend Paphy call and smooth her over ? What line would Mr. Engew take ? If she left the church, would others follow her ? Would she “ take to the chapel ” ? Would there be an open scandal ? Whatever was going to happen next ?

So they questioned and so they waited, anticipating a crisis, or at least a second scene, unaware that the crisis, like many another, had come and gone unperceived. All possibilities were canvassed with greedy hopefulness, and when the days dragged

on and no dramatic collision took place, some folks began to declare that there never had been a battle, because, since the parish meeting, the combatants had never met face to face to contest their cause by word or blow. They little knew that many a battle is fought in solitude. Accustomed to weapons of steel and fist, of vituperation and calumny, they had never thought about the effectiveness of thought and silence as means of warfare. Some veil of darkness hid this mental background from their vision.

No further protest was heard from Mrs. Engew. Isaac Watts did not turn, so far as anybody knew, in his grave. The old hymn-books became covered with mildew and the new ones began to have a worn appearance. Mrs. Engew did not attend Mattins again. Mr. Engew occupied the front pew as before, using the old books and singing the old hymns in stentorian tones whenever it was possible. When a new hymn was given out he sat down and read the Bible to mark his disapproval. Then he grew less and less regular, until his absence from church became the normal thing.

“She’s driving him away from the Services,” said Miss Carkeek, thereby showing how little she understood the nature of Mr. Engew, who, manlike, was more easily led than driven. But some poetic licence is permissible in one neighbour’s judgment of another, or how could any consistent reputation

ever be established? And poetic licence had, by this time, invested Mrs. Engew with a permanently aggressive attitude.

It was nothing less than a public disappointment when the Tolskithy world realized that Mrs. Engew would neither "take to the chapel" nor cut the vicar in the street. So tame an ending to an outburst of such mighty promise.

What the Reverend Paphy thought about it all, nobody ever knew. What he appeared to think about it was just nothing at all. It is hardly possible to believe that no rumour had reached his ears of that oration by the village pump; for in Tolskithy the very snails on the wall carry news and even the deaf are well informed. But, whatever he may have heard, he took no action and made no retort.

The fact is that, even as a boy, Epaphroditus Webber had never been hard on his fellow-creatures. He had always an excuse for another. When the school bully had cut his elbow by throwing stones, no one could elicit the story from the victim, and when the headmaster had him up and asked for the truth about his arm he only said, "It broke out bleeding on the stairs." Later on in his career when the biggest ruffian in the district rifled the Almsgiving box on Christmas Eve, his single comment on the incident and on the thief himself

was, "He has always been rather a difficult person."

He never expressed the spirit of toleration in words, he made no profession of faith or charity, but day after day a genuine love for all his fellow-creatures brought happiness to himself and them. He had a use for every type and a friendly word for every living thing. The confirmed backbiter of the village he described as "rather chatty, dear soul"; and when the minister of the chapel made a public attack on his character, he neither defended himself nor abused his assailant, he merely remarked, "It is a pity." There is little doubt that, had he been present at the pump instead of engaged in taking off his surplice in the vestry, he would only have murmured, "Dear me, what an excitable lady." And, in whatever guise the highly varnished version of her oratory did come to his ears, it is not conceivable that he felt any impulse to repay the lady in her own coin.

It is not difficult to look into the mind of the Reverend Paphy, a week or two after the introduction of the new hymn-books, for he was a transparent soul and he led a transparent life.

It was Sunday evening and he sat in his study with his legs up against the mantelpiece, smoking a pipe of very strong tobacco. The Sunday work was over and there were six blessed days before he need write another sermon, six happy days of intercourse with his fellow-creatures, six days free

of care, where duty and pleasure went hand in hand. The dear people of his parish, how he loved them all. The kiddies coming out of school in their tight jerseys and their pinafores; the old people sunning themselves in their little gardens with a background of whitewashed wall; the shock-haired lads with lurching walk and hands that hung, when they were not walking, in aimless fashion at their sides; the apple-cheeked urchins who sang in the choir; the girls in silk stockings and bright jumpers who tried so hard to wear their Sunday clothes with an everyday, accustomed air. Miss Carkeek too, with her quick tongue and her eyes darting here and there like those of a bird; Mrs. Engew with her touching affection for the old ways and the old hymns; Pelly Bolitho with his curved and shuffling figure; old Josiah at the shop with his white beard and his queer muttering ways and the aroma of yeast all round him; how he loved them, every one of them. His people, his own people, and he in the very middle of them all. What a good and blessed world it was.

He took a long contented puff at his pipe and reached out for the nearest book. The study was not full of tomes and sermons, for he was no scholar. Only one or two well-worn volumes were lying on the table; the Bible; *Alice in Wonderland*; *Vanity Fair*; and this new green volume that he had just picked up, a book of hymns. He turned

over the leaves, puffing out clouds of smoke and reading a verse here and there.

“ Our little systems have their day ;
 They have their day and cease to be :
 They are but broken lights of thee,
 And thou, O Lord, art more than they.”

Yes, one could live in a rut. These new hymn-books now, they were a step onward. Moving with the times. What a favourite phrase now, a hackneyed phrase. But very important for the Church too. Much more important than the study of Ancient Fathers. Much more important than contention between High Church and Low. You couldn't imprison the modern spirit of inquiry in frozen formulæ. You must link up everyday life and the services somehow. It was difficult ; very. But surely these hymns were a step in the right direction. They expressed the modern spirit. We didn't want to cringe and whine about being “ worms of earth.” That didn't help us to live straight, to be kind to our neighbours and generous in thought.

“ God of our Fathers, known of old,
 Lord of our far-flung battle line—
 Beneath whose awful Hand we hold
 Dominion over palm and pine—
 Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
 Lest we forget, lest we forget ! ”

There was a virile modern hymn for you. “ God of our Fathers.” The same yesterday and to-day

and for ever. Ah, but how many million million reflections of Him ; every blade of grass holding out its little mirror, every stone and leaf and pool and living creature ; the man of action and the man of thought, the poet of battles and of peace, men of all nations and times, Kipling and Isaac Watts, every one of them reaching out to reflect the Creator from one angle or another. Blurred the image might be ; fragmentary it must be ; no leaf or ocean or spirit was big enough to reflect the whole. But think of it ; only think of it. A world full of reflectors, some consciously tilting at this or that aspect, others just spreading themselves open to take all that is given.

“ All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful,
The Lord God made them all.”

And the crooked things as well. . . . The book dropped from his hand but his train of thought was not interrupted.

And the unfinished, and the ugly and angular people. The writer must have forgotten them for the moment. Yes . . . all of them lovable ; very lovable. Everybody. . . . And everything . . .

The vicar's pipe had gone out now and his head was nodding.

He was seated under a palm tree reading his Bible. Beyond the shadow of the palm, out in

the sunny desert, was the village pump, overhung by a single pine. A heat-haze shimmered on the horizon, far away across those miles and miles of golden sand. A little group stood underneath the pine-tree ; all the people were singing with green books in their hands. Old Josiah was there with his beard and apron and a knife for cutting cheese, and Miss Carkeek hopped from branch to branch as she conducted with a rush in her hand. Mrs. Engew gave out the number of the hymn and Pelly Bolitho, with his overcoat sagging round his heels, struck up the tune :

“ All people that on earth do dwell
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.”

.

Mrs. Engew also was sitting over the fire on this Sunday evening, but she was very wide-awake. Her imagination did not range from pine to palm among varied people and conditions. She had no parish in her care, no ever-widening interest in her fellow-men, not even a black pipe to stimulate her vision. She had only Mr. Engew and her own accustomed ways of thinking, moving and acting. Such was her equipment for life, and what she had she valued. She walked with unfaltering step and carried her light on high.

At this moment she was reading to herself from an old black hymn-book. Circumstances beyond

her own control had kept her from worshipping her Maker in the appointed time and place, but custom impelled her to take up a "good" book on a Sunday evening. Having read the portion in her little manual she ended the day with a verse from her favourite hymn :

" Were the whole realm of Nature mine,
That were an offering far too small ;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."

Then she closed the book with a sigh and lighted her bedroom candle.

.

Now you have the facts before you, and if you think that the religion of the Reverend Paphy grew in his heart while that of Mrs. Engew was lost under a formula of words—well, you are welcome to your thoughts. You and I and Miss Carkeek are given to classifying things as large and small, we cannot rise above the habit.

Yet it is possible that the Creator of us all lives in a world where dimension has no sway. He has made the foxglove and the daisy, the oak tree and the fungus, the green-fly and the evening star. He directs the driving squadrons of cloud whose home is in space, and the mole that burrows underground. He has fashioned a universe where colour, wind and scent have their appointed meaning, impressive as the weight of iron, impressive as the

mass of earth and stone. With a single breath He has created the mountain that endures a thousand years and the petal that will fall to-morrow. He does not weigh the fragrance of a blue bell with the rock Gibraltar, nor set the glow-worm against the bull.

How can He who made the ant and Leviathan divide his creatures into great and small? The scheme of things has room for the Reverend Epaphroditus and for Mrs. Engew. For every creature there is a share in the universal rhythm, for the sun radiating beams afar, for the embryo unfolding in the dark, for a handful of pollen and the wide unresting sea.

He looks down, it may be, on His world of infinite variety and sees it all as one, one in form though flashing light from a million facets, one in spirit waiting for his lightest whisper.

CHAPTER XXV

A GARDEN

ἔνθα κ' ἔπειτα καὶ ἀθάνατός περ ἔπελθων
θηήσαιτο ἰδὼν καὶ τερφθείη φρεσὶν ᾗσιν

There even an immortal who chanced to come might
Gaze and marvel and delight his soul,

Odyssey v. 73-74.

THE little valley running down to the creek gathers and holds, in its green hollow, all the high lights and deep shadows in the world. Just now every shade of green and yellow finds a place there in evergreen shrub and bursting bud. There are brilliant exotic plants and familiar wild ones ; here a scarlet rhododendron with penetrating colour, here a gorse bush dazzling gold, and there a clump of heather with cool, metallic foliage, nestling into a green background.

On the terrace where the house stands, facing south, you catch every ray of sunlight. You look down a steep grass bank, over the valley full of colour, to a narrow field at the bottom, where the grass is always vivid emerald and the passing clouds print black shadows on it, a wonderful shifting tracery.

Your outlook on field and garden is framed in blue and grey ; steel-blue is the vista of sea-water, silver grey is the wintry wood a mile away across the creek.

You feel that you could leap with one bound across the dark green laurels, the flaming shrubs, the feathery bamboos and palms, into that emerald field and the steel-blue water beyond ; but when you take the downward path there is a different tale to tell. A long time will pass, while you wander in that enchanted maze, before you emerge face to face with the sea.

There never was a garden where you must study form as you must study it here. You cannot settle a plant against a chosen background and leave it there, secure of admiration, for grass paths zigzag everywhere up and down the steep sides of the valley, turning with dramatic suddenness ; so that, sooner or later, you see each plant from every angle, from above, below, behind, in front. You must consider every plant in its relation to the whole garden.

That beech, for instance ; as you stand on the terrace its boughs begin to hide the emerald field. The gardener says it must be lopped ; but you go down the west side of the valley and look across at the tree, broadside on. There it stands in its winter symmetry, a thing of vast and perfect proportions. Every limb, from the straight grey

trunk to the most fragile twig is etched in silver grey against dark firs ; they seem to stand there simply to throw it into relief, quietly content, like some pool that holds an unrippled reflection. It would be sacrilege to cut a branch.

I know no garden so reticent of its beauties.

Do you remember looking for Old Masters in Venice ? Unearthing them, one at a time, after long search, in some dim aisle or vestry ? That is the way to see pictures ; and gardens. This garden will never fling its beauty in your face. Not without some trouble will you gain a knowledge of its treasures, for it hides each one with a fostering, individual love. Yet it is always to that first impression that you return, an impression only reinforced by greater intimacy ; a blaze of colour in a green dell, an emerald line below, and the steel-blue water beyond ; sentinel firs on the left, velvet green firs full of shadow ; tree-tops on the right with red elm-buds in early spring against the sky ; and, away across the water, the grey wood looking down on the creek.

Let us start, right-handed, from the house on the downward path.

You pass under a great chestnut, in full leaf now, but when the buds were sticky and the light came through the branches the bank was full of early treasures, familiar low-growing flowers from the yellow aconite with its green frill to the spotted

fritillary and the little cyclamen. Just now a few scarlet fulgens survive in their struggle with the grass and there are blue bells, wood anemones and primroses. Turning left you follow down the western side where the ground slopes to a boggy armlet of the valley. A group of purple iris raise sentinel heads in the green marsh. Those winter willows which, in January, glowed like flame in a bare, grey garden, now, turned russet-brown, are bursting into leaf. They must be pruned severely, or next year they will lose their brilliancy.

Very soon the boggy vista is hidden, for the slope is crowned with flowering shrubs and evergreens. They grow in a competitive and rather colourless tangle, when suddenly, like a flash of lightning, there is a gleam of gold where the double gorse raises his head in the crowd.

You wander on in a quiescent mood, for the grey-green gloom of a shrubbery begins to dull your expectation. Only now and then the bushes open on your left and you can look across to where the wall of fir-trees stands above the garden, barring the east wind that would sweep down with icy breath into the valley.

Suddenly you come upon a nook full of rare shrubs, and towering above them all a great magnolia in full bloom, with pink cups clear against the sky while the lower blooms are in sharp relief against a background of ilex and palm. Very soon the

Chilian lantern tree will be ablaze with blood-red drops and later it will stand, erect as ever, over its brilliant carpet of shed petals. As if delighting in sudden contrast, the path leads straight from these sequestered treasures to a view of the wild orchard ; wild it is indeed ! Here is no formal palisade, no rectangular planting of trees. It is just a dell full of low apple-trees, daffodils, blue bells, primroses and blue alkanet. You look down into that green hollow, starred with colour, and there your gaze must linger on the blue bells and the wonderful blue-grey shadows that hang like a mist round those twisted apple-trees.

Have you never seen blue-grey apple branches ? Do you think that such things cannot be ? But then, have you ever looked down on apple-trees from above, seeing their branches outlined against grass and blue bells ? You never do, in this garden, approach a plant in the straightforward, commonplace way. What a mute sermon against formality ! What a paradise of form and colour !

It is hard to say which touches you more nearly, for often some colour will deaden your receptive faculties to other things, overwhelming you with its intensity, till you feel blind, as if you had been looking at the sun. Colour can stab like a knife. The joy it gives can be very near to pain. Form enfolds you more gently, with a sense of wonder and satisfaction mingled. Both obliterate all else

for the moment. Here the painter and the sculptor need have no quarrel : each can enjoy his own impressions to the full.

The orchard draws into itself all the peace of the garden. In this museum of trees and shrubs, this maze of flaunting blossom and brilliant flower, it strikes a valuable note of simplicity, and if you want to spend an hour drinking in the spirit of the garden you will lie on the slope where you can watch the blue-grey mist between the naked branches, as you crush that far-away scent of Fairyland out of the blue bells.

Winding back, you now find yourself facing the house on a lower level than before, above you are groups of rose and white azaleas and straggling bushes of rosemary, while below, the bank falling gradually to the depth of the valley, is studded with rare and giant conifers. They all have long names, but these do not matter, though botanical fogies pore over their time-worn labels, regardless of the colours round them.

Some weep with pendulous silver branches like mermaids' hair or seaweed, while others stand in military attitudes rearing their spear-like tips far above the common crowd ; and all of them make an invaluable background to the brilliant rose and pink and scarlet rhododendrons that grow like splashes of colour painted in swiftly by the Master's hand.

Those red rhododendrons ! The inner glow of

them in sunlight, and their cold, reserved look when the shadows fall ! You could watch them half a day and never guess all the secrets of light and shade that they hold. People have said that scarlet has no mystery, that it appeals to vulgar souls, that it catches the eye of savages and children ; but there is nothing more elusive in the garden than the tone of those scarlet rhododendrons. In brilliant sunlight, it is true, the soul of them comes out to meet you ; they give out their beauty without reserve, they are luminous, as if some flame burnt within their waxen petals. Suddenly, when the sun dips, their flame dies low, and they look out from their foliage with a cold, disinterested air. As the light fails they settle back into their green collars, they become colourless forms, mere rounded shapes against the drooping points. They have surrendered all their brilliancy to the night, while the white and yellow flowers are yet gleaming in the dusk.

On days when the sun does not appear they have a different personality. They lose self-confidence. Conscious that they no longer draw the first glance of every new-comer, their animation dies, leaving them mere red flowers not scarlet flames. To each his day. The paler brothers have a chance now, and there is one, rose-pink with drooping trusses, that positively glows in a dull atmosphere while sunlight only draws out its more shallow tones.

Suddenly, coming round a gigantic cypress, there

is a vista into Japan : two double cherries in full bloom. Not the usual miniature shrubs, but wide-spreading trees, old, interlaced and angular, with wealth of blossom far above your head. These double cherries have been dowered with free will. Theirs are the most exuberant personalities in the whole garden. As you sit under them and look up, your world is just blossom, blossom, blossom, nothing else. Luxuriant, rejoicing, generous, as if the tree had given its last drop of sap and vitality to produce that miracle. I have heard them called flamboyant, full-blown, vulgar ! It is true you can almost hear them singing aloud with joy in the fullness of their own life. Yet no impression of heaviness or overweight remains, but, with all that full-blooming glory, a sense of something transparent and fragile, here to-day and gone to-morrow.

The garden never sustains one note too long. Just when the beauty of the cherries begins to close you in, shutting out all the world, you become aware of a dull red maple close at hand. Dull ? Well, hardly that, but it has the quality of colour peculiar to maple leaves not quite unfolded. They have burst their sheaths but are not spread wide ; their full brilliance is not yet, something of their glory is withheld for a day or two. It stands near the giant cypress, yet just apart, so that, while the light plays unhindered through its leaves, the eye

is satisfied in passing from light cherry blossom to darker hues of red and green.

But the maple by those cherries in the early morning! The sunlight playing through and over those leaves which have the transparency of a shell, some ethereal radiance neither rose nor red! It makes one catch one's breath and sets one's pulse a-leaping with joy and wonder.

Beyond the double cherries the path curves again and, finding itself in the very bottom of the valley, turns finally towards the sea. Now there is no looking down on plants, only around and upwards. Here are no vistas, but every yard holds a treasure. In this hollow all the scent and colour of the garden is concentrated. Just now a group of mixed azaleas are breaking into bloom and their warm, intoxicating scent prevails over every other.

Passing under patriarchal laurels that writhe and turn in angular fashion, you find yourself once more in a green and shady world. Their trunks are propped near the angles, for many are rotting with age. There is a massive dignity about these gigantic evergreens that makes them worthy of their place in the heart of the garden. And still the path leads down with a green jungle on your right, where bamboos line the watercourse that trickles down the bottom of the valley.

But the sea?

Since that first view on the terrace you have

never been conscious of it. You might have been wandering in some far inland hollow. Even when you have left the scent and colour behind you and are following the low quickset hedge by the emerald field, you are not conscious of the nearness of the sea. Your eye rests on cool green. Your mind is full of coloured impressions. Wander down as often as you may, every time you open the little gate under the ilexes, by the bottom of the field, the shock is unexpected. For it is a shock, call it what you will. The sudden beauty of the sea affects you almost like a physical impact.

You have passed in a single moment from confusion to peace, from richness to simplicity, from crowds to space ; from the exuberant garden to the little beach at your feet where the waves break gently, sucking back the shingle ; where the calm water of the creek lies before you ; and away on your left is the open sea, seen through two headlands. One headland has Perugino trees on the green point and the other has slopes of red bracken and early blackthorn and a sheet of primroses ; you can see their cool yellow a mile away. Your gaze rests on great space and there is peace all round you.

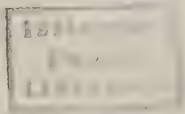
All that was hectic, multitudinous and variegated about your sensations in the valley is now reduced to a deep simplicity. The garden called you hither and thither and all those scents and colours filled you with a disturbing sense of joy. You were

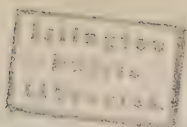
feverish with that restless longing for self-expression born always in the presence of inexpressible beauty. But now everything that you have thought and felt is gathered up and expressed in that breadth of sea and sky. The sea calms all your fever; all desires are laid to rest and every aspiration satisfied.

Stillness and space and the sea. Can one ever be unconscious of water, or unaffected by its presence? Water rushing, flowing or seething can stir you to your depths, can fill you with exhilaration, energy and wonder; but water at peace like this, the boundless sea with green things mirrored in its calm, can only petrify you into an attitude of silent worship. And in worship all craving for self-expression is satisfied.

What more fitting boundary to that garden of delight? It does not take away from, but rather reinforces your vivid impressions. For the moment you may feel that the whole garden was but a prelude to this sudden glory of sea and sky, but in time to come you will always remember the calm water of the creek, summer and winter, night and day, keeping immemorial guard at the foot of that bejewelled valley.

THE END





GLOSSARY OF CORNISH WORDS

- Aglet, hawthorn berry.
Airy-mouse, bat.
Angle ditch, worm.
Apple-bird, chaffinch.
Appledrane, wasp.
Arish, stubble.
Athurt, to look athurt, to squint.
Bannel, broom.
Buddle, a pit for separating ore from dross by washing.
Budpecker, bullfinch.
Bully, pebble.
Clunk, to swallow.
Clunker, uvula.
Countryman's treacle, garlic.
Creem, a trembling from fear or cold.
Crickmole, somersault.
Croust, food taken between meals.
Daps, likeness.
Drill-drolls, trailing plants.
Ekky-mowl, titmouse.
Fitty, proper.
Foathy or Forethy, pert or intrusive.
Fooch, disorder.
Gammut, to frolic.
Gladdie, yellow-hammer.
Grammersow, wood-louse.
Grey-bird, thrush.
Guckoos, blue bells.
Haaf-saved, half-witted.
Hay-maiden, ground-ivy.
Heva, the cry of the huer when he announces the shoal of pilchards.
Holla-pot, empty-headed person.
Hollensmocks, sea-campion.
Horse-adder, dragon-fly.
Huer, a watchman stationed on some high point to signal the position of pilchard shoals to the men in the seine-boats.
Hurried, frightened.
John-jaick, snail.
Joustin, shaking.
Kellas, pig-nut.
Labbatt, lout (also ear).
Leary, hungry.
Lem, imp or young rogue.
Lights, lungs (risin' o' the lights, a choking feeling in the throat).

- Lipsy, epilepsy.
Lizzamoo, cow-parsnip.
Mazed, mad.
Mot, stump of a tree.
Mow, stack.
Mowhay, rickyard.
Muryan, ant.
Mutting, sulky (mut with
your mait, refuse to eat
your food).
Nosy, interfering.
Pedn-paley, tom-tit.
Planchin, wood floor.
Plum, soft.
Poar, fuss.
Putt, take.
Quailaway, styte.
Quam, fainting fit.
Quilkin, frog.
Quingy, quinsy.
Scaow, elder tree.
Scat abroad, broken or burst
open.
- School, shoal of fish.
Screed, a small bit.
Slewed, drunk.
Smeech, a strong disagree-
able smell.
Sparey, slow (applied to a
job with much labour
and little to show for
it).
Stack, a tall, single chimney.
Stank, to tread heavily.
Stillwaters, distilled pepper-
mint water.
Strub, rob.
Teel, to plant or sow.
Ting, to tie.
Townplace, farmyard.
Voace-putt, something done
under compulsion.
Want, mole.
Whinnard, redwing.
Whisht, sad.
Whitneck, weasel.



